

**Democratic Services****Location:** Phase II**Ext:** 0692**DDI:** 01895 250692**CMD No:** 1599

**To: COUNCILLOR SUSAN O'BRIEN  
CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES &  
EDUCATION**

c.c. All Members of the Children, Families & Education Select Committee

c.c. Tehseen Kauser – Children's Social Care

c.c. Julie Kelly – Corporate Director of Children's Services

**Date:** 13 January 2026

**Non-Key Decision request****Form D****CARE STRATEGY (2025–2030)**

Dear Cabinet Members,

Attached is a report requesting that a decision be made by you as an individual Cabinet Member. Democratic Services confirm that this is not a key decision, as such, the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 notice period does not apply.

You should take a decision **on or after Wednesday 21 January 2026** in order to meet Constitutional requirements about publication of decisions that are to be made. You may wish to discuss the report with the Corporate Director before it is made. Please indicate your decision on the duplicate memo supplied and return it to me when you have made your decision. I will then arrange for the formal notice of decision to be published.

Ryan Dell  
Democratic Services Officer

**Title of Report:** Care Strategy (2025–2030)

**Decision made:**

**Reasons for your decision:** (e.g. as stated in report)

**Alternatives considered and rejected:** (e.g. as stated in report)

Signed ..... Date .....

*Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education*

# Care Strategy (2025–2030)

<b>Cabinet Member &amp; Portfolio</b>	Councillor Susan O'Brien, Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education
<b>Responsible Officer</b>	Julie Kelly, Corporate Director of Children's Services Tehseen Kauser, Director of Children's Social Care
<b>Report Author &amp; Directorate</b>	Tehseen Kauser – Children's Social Care
<b>Papers with report</b>	Appendix A – Care Strategy Appendix B – Select Committee Report

## HEADLINES

<b>Summary</b>	This report seeks approval to note the strategic direction and priorities for Hillingdon's cared for children and care experienced young people and to endorse the proposed Care Strategy and implementation timelines. The strategy sets out our statutory duties, local priorities and actions to strengthen participation, placement stability, pathways to achievement and independence, health and wellbeing, and the transition to adulthood.
<b>Putting our Residents First</b>  <b>Delivering on the Council Strategy 2022-2026</b>	This report supports our ambition for residents and the Council to create: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thriving, healthy households across the borough, underpinned by an efficient, well-run, and digitally-enabled council that works collaboratively with partners to deliver services which improve the lives of all our residents.</li></ul>
<b>Financial Cost</b>	N/A
<b>Select Committee</b>	Children, Families & Education Select Committee
<b>Ward(s)</b>	N/A

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education:

1. Notes the strategic direction and priorities outlined in the strategy; and
2. Agrees the Care Strategy 2025-2023 and timelines set out.

### Reasons for recommendations

The Care Strategy (2025–2030) provides a clear framework for improving outcomes for cared for children and care experienced young people, co-produced with young people, practitioners and

partners. It aligns with statutory responsibilities under the Children Act 1989 and 2004 and implements corporate parenting principles, focusing on participation, permanence, education, employment and training (EET), health and wellbeing, and safe transitions into adulthood. Endorsement enables disciplined delivery, robust performance monitoring and accountability through the Corporate Parenting Panel.

## **Alternative options considered/ risk management**

Alternatives considered:

- Do nothing/ maintain current arrangements without a unified strategy: rejected as it would limit coherence, reduce accountability and risk inconsistent outcomes.
- Narrow thematic plans (e.g., separate placement or EET plans only): rejected as young people's needs are interdependent and require a whole-system approach with co-production and cross-partnership delivery.
- Short-term action plan only: rejected as insufficient to address medium-term sufficiency, workforce stability and local provision development.

Key risks and mitigations:

- Placement sufficiency and stability risk due to market capacity constraints: mitigated through a formal sufficiency strategy, recruitment/ retention of foster carers (including Mockingbird), development of local residential and supported accommodation, and strengthened kinship pathways.
- Housing availability for care leavers in London: mitigated through joint housing protocols, partnerships with providers (e.g., YMCA/P3), Staying Put and Staying Close offers, and clear accommodation pathways with early planning and panel oversight.
- EET engagement risk: mitigated via Virtual School support up to age 25, bespoke apprenticeships, equipment and bursaries, and improved monitoring dashboards to trigger timely support.
- Health and wellbeing needs including mental health: mitigated via MAPS, Transition Nurse and Health Passport, priority access to local health and wellbeing services, and trauma-informed practice.
- Participation fatigue/ weak coproduction: mitigated through CiCCs, Youth Voice Forum, "you said, we did" register, and structured feedback loops to evidence impact.

## **Democratic compliance/ previous authority**

Recent formal decisions include ongoing oversight by the Corporate Parenting Panel and annual performance reporting to relevant Committees and the Department for Education. The Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education has provided a foreword endorsing the strategy principles, and Democratic Services will review and update this section as required. Any delegated authority to implement associated delivery plans and sufficiency strategies will be referenced in the decision minute.

## **Select Committee comments**

The Children, Families and Education Select Committee welcomes the Care Strategy for Children and Care Experienced Young People. The Strategy provides a clear and coherent framework that demonstrates the Council's strong commitment to delivering high-quality care, support, and opportunities for children and young people with care experience. It clearly outlines the Council's statutory responsibilities, local priorities, and proposed actions to strengthen support, promote

stability, and improve transition pathways, ensuring that cared for and care experienced young people are equipped to flourish and thrive.

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1. The Care Strategy sets out core principles: supportive relationships; holistic support; advocacy and participation; continuity and stability; aspirations and achievements; and a commitment to continuous improvement. It is co-produced with young people and embeds corporate parenting duties.
2. Local context (31 March 2025): 312 cared for children; 602 care experienced young people (18–25); 17% UCSA; 47% in foster care; 10.3% in residential homes; 8.3% experienced 3+ placements; 80% care leavers in suitable accommodation; 57% engaged in EET; 12 Staying Put and 47 in Staying Close.
3. Participation: three active CiCCs (Talkers, Step Up, Stepping Out) co-chair the Corporate Parenting Panel; recruitment, training and policy development involve young people; a “You said, we did” register evidences impact.
4. Health and wellbeing: annual health assessments; MAPS; PACE and trauma-informed practice; priority access to youth health offers; development of Health Passport and transitions surgeries.
5. Education and employment: Virtual School supports up to age 25, PEPs from early years, laptops and bursaries, apprenticeships and ESOL; strengthened challenge to schools to raise ambition.
6. Accommodation and transitions: Staying Put, Staying Close, supported lodgings, semi-independent living; joint housing protocols; Setting Up Home allowance; panel oversight for transitions to Adult Social Care.
7. Performance and accountability: dashboards, audits, complaints/compliments monitoring, annual reporting to committees/DfE; celebration of achievements through Kids in Care Awards.
8. Future work: early intervention (Family Hubs/Family Help), kinship care expansion, local provision development, permanency planning, foster carer recruitment/retention, restorative practice, Step Across initiatives.

## RESIDENT BENEFIT & CONSULTATION

### **The benefit or impact upon Hillingdon residents, service users and communities**

The proposed Care Strategy will have a significant positive impact on Hillingdon residents, particularly cared for children, care experienced young people, and their families. By prioritising thriving, healthy households, the strategy ensures that vulnerable young people receive high-

quality, consistent support tailored to their needs. This approach promotes stability, wellbeing, and long-term achievement, directly supporting the Council's vision of "putting residents first".

Key benefits include:

- Improved placement stability and permanence for children in care.
- Enhanced pathways to education, employment, and independence.
- Greater access to health and wellbeing services, including mental health support.
- Stronger transition support into adulthood, reducing the risk of isolation or disadvantage.
- Increased opportunities for young people to participate in shaping the services they receive.

## **Stakeholder and Participation Engagement**

The development of this strategy has been underpinned by extensive engagement with a wide range of stakeholders:

- **Young People's Participation:** Multiple engagement sessions were held with cared for children and care experienced young people, ensuring their voices, experiences, and aspirations directly shaped the strategy. Feedback was gathered through forums, surveys, and participation groups, with young people actively involved in co-producing key elements.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Officers worked closely with carers, social workers, health professionals, education partners, and voluntary sector organisations. Their insights and expertise informed the priorities and actions within the strategy.
- **Ongoing Consultation:** The Corporate Parenting Panel and Children in Care Councils (CiCCs) continue to provide structured opportunities for ongoing feedback and co-production, ensuring the strategy remains dynamic and responsive to evolving needs.

## **Equalities Implications**

An Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment has been undertaken to ensure the strategy promotes fairness and addresses the needs of all groups within Hillingdon. Key outcomes include:

- Targeted support for groups at greater risk of disadvantage, such as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, young people with disabilities, and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Commitment to inclusive practice, ensuring all young people have equitable access to services, opportunities, and support.
- Ongoing monitoring of outcomes to identify and address any disparities.

## **Consultation & Engagement Carried Out**

- Extensive engagement with young people, carers, and professional stakeholders through multiple sessions and forums.
- Ongoing consultation via the Corporate Parenting Panel and Children in Care Councils.
- Collaboration with health, education, and housing partners to ensure a holistic and joined-up approach.

## **Financial Implications**

There are no direct financial implications arising from approving the Care Strategy itself, as the document sets the strategic framework and priorities rather than committing to specific new expenditure. Any costs associated with delivery will be contained within existing approved budgets or will be subject to separate business cases and decision-making processes.

## **CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Corporate Finance**

Corporate Finance have reviewed this report and note that there are no direct financial implications associated with the recommendations in this report. Furthermore, it is noted that costs associated with the delivery of the strategy will be met from existing approved budgets or will be subject to separate business cases and the decision-making process. Costs associated with the delivery of the strategy will be monitored as part of the regular monthly budget monitoring cycle and as part of the wider MTFS.

### **Legal**

There are no legal impediments to the recommendations in the report.

### **Property**

N/A

### **Comments from other relevant service areas**

N/A

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

NIL.

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix A – Care Strategy for Children and Care Experienced Young People (November 2025–2030)

Appendix B – Select Committee report (13 November 2025)

# Hillingdon's Care Strategy November 2025-2030





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# Foreword

**As leaders in Hillingdon's Children's Services, we are proud to present this strategy for our cared for children and care experienced young people. Between us, we bring nearly three decades of service to Hillingdon Council, Poppy with 21 years and Tehseen with eight years. Throughout this time, we have witnessed the incredible resilience, strength, and potential of our children and young people. It is their stories, their triumphs, and their voices that have shaped this strategy and continue to inspire our work every day.**

We are proud of how far we've come in Hillingdon. During recent years, we have made significant changes to how we listen, care and support. We've strengthened relationships, improved outcomes, and placed young people at the heart of everything we do. The difference is real and it's visible in the confidence, ambition, and achievements of our young people.

We feel humbled by the journeys we've seen. Young people who may not have had the best start in life have gone on to achieve bigger and better things with the right support, encouragement, and belief. Their success is a testament to what's possible when care is delivered with compassion, consistency, and ambition.

We have high aspirations for our service and for every child and young person we care for. This strategy is not just a document, it's a promise. A promise to keep improving, listening and striving for the very best. We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all the individuals, organisations, and young people who have contributed their expertise, insight, and experiences to the development of this strategy. Their contributions have been invaluable, and we are honoured to have their voices at the heart of our work.

Together, we embark on this journey of transformation, empowerment, and growth, as we strive to make a positive and lasting difference in the lives of care experienced young people in the London Borough of Hillingdon.

**Tehseen Kauser,  
Director of Children's  
Social Care**



**Poppy Reddy,  
Assistant Director –  
Children's Care, Support  
and Transitions**



# A message from the Director of Children's Services, Julie Kelly

**At Hillingdon Council, we take immense pride in our role as corporate parents to the children and young people in our care, as well as those who have left our care. We recognise that our responsibility is to provide each child with the same level of care, respect, and support that we would want for our own children. Our commitment is to champion their successes, celebrate their achievements, and ensure they have the robust support needed to thrive in every aspect of their lives.**

This strategy reaffirms our unwavering dedication to safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of all our cared for children and care experienced young people. Our ambition is to make Hillingdon a borough where every child can flourish, regardless of their background or circumstances. This document sets out the key services and support we provide as our young people navigate their journey through care and into adulthood.

We are determined to ensure that our young people are not only recipients of services but are actively involved in shaping them. Their voices, experiences, and aspirations are central to our approach, and we are committed to co-producing services that truly meet their needs.

As Director of Children's Services, I want every child in our care to feel safe, loved, and supported to thrive. Our children deserve the same hopes, dreams, and opportunities as any other child, and it is our collective responsibility across the council and our partners to ensure they are surrounded by care, stability, and ambition. This strategy is rooted in a deep commitment to listening to our children, valuing their voices, and acting with compassion and determination to meet their needs. Together, we will work tirelessly to ensure every child we care for is not only well looked after, but truly seen, heard, and championed.

Our commitment to our children and young people is unwavering. We will continue to do everything in our power to provide them with the care, support, and opportunities they deserve, so that when they look back on their time in care, they remember it as a positive and fulfilling experience, one that has given them the confidence and foundation to succeed in adult life.

**Julie Kelly,  
Corporate Director,  
Children's Services**



# A message from our Cabinet Member

**As the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education, I am proud to champion the needs and aspirations of our cared for children and care experienced young people in Hillingdon. This strategy is not just a plan, it is our promise to do what any good parent would do: provide love, stability, and opportunities for every child to thrive.**

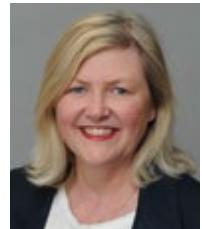
Our ambition is clear, to make Hillingdon a place where every child feels safe, valued, and supported to reach their full potential. We will achieve this by listening to our young people's voices and ensuring their experiences shape the services we deliver. Their insight is central to this strategy, and we are committed to co-producing solutions that truly reflect what matters most to them.

This strategy also reflects our determination to tackle barriers and stigma, strengthen relationships, and create a culture of aspiration and

belonging. It sets out how we will work together across education, health, housing, and the wider community to deliver consistent, high quality support. We recognise that being in care or leaving care can be challenging, and we will do everything possible to ensure that no young person feels alone or without hope for the future.

I want to thank our dedicated staff, carers, partners, and most importantly, our young people. Your resilience and courage inspire us every day. Together, we will keep striving for excellence and make Hillingdon a borough where every child and young person can look forward to a bright, fulfilling future.

**Councillor Susan O'Brien,  
Cabinet Member for  
Children, Families and  
Education**



## A message to our young people from one of our young people

Being in care isn't easy, but there is always someone to help and look after us. Hillingdon ensures that meetings are helpful and you know what's going on. Support from the Virtual School will be really useful for your education and there are lots of opportunities to get involved and meet other people to be part of the Hillingdon family. While turning 18 can be difficult, someone will

be there to guide you through, to prepare you for the future. Hillingdon has written this document as it's important for them to tell us all the important things they do for us to help us on our journeys through care.

**CH,  
Our care experienced young person**

# Our strategy for cared for children and care experienced young people

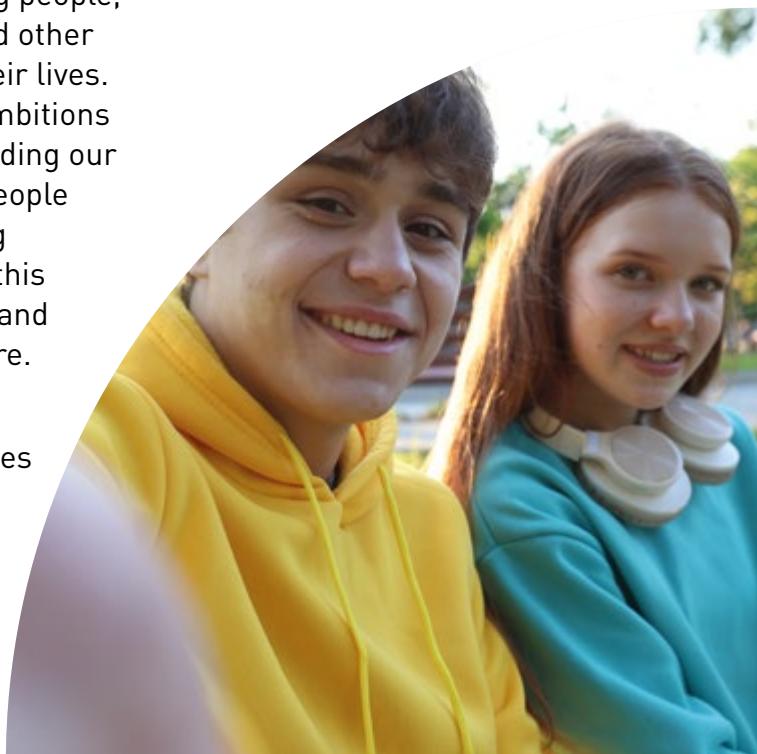
Welcome to Hillingdon Council's strategy for our cared for children and care experienced young people. This document outlines our commitment to delivering high quality care, support, and opportunities for individuals with lived experience of care. We recognise the distinct challenges faced by cared for children and care experienced young people and uphold the principle that all young people are entitled to realise their potential, irrespective of their previous circumstances.

At Hillingdon, we understand that council care is a significant factor in a young person's journey. We acknowledge the importance of providing an environment that promotes stability, empowerment, and belonging. Through this strategy, our aim is to support every young person in our care to achieve their potential, be the best version of themselves, and pursue their aspirations.

This strategy has been developed following comprehensive consultation with our care experienced young people, their carers, social workers, and other key professionals involved in their lives. Their input, experiences, and ambitions have played a central role in guiding our approach. By engaging young people throughout the decision-making process, we aim to ensure that this strategy addresses their needs and reflects their hopes for the future.

This strategy outlines how the council will fulfil its responsibilities as set out in national guidance, ensuring all cared for children and care experienced young people are valued, respected, and supported.

Following consultation with our young people, and for the purpose of this strategy, we have moved away from acronyms such as LAC (looked after children) or CIC (children in care). Instead, we now refer to those we care for as 'cared for children' and 'care experienced young people', terms that were chosen by our young people and they felt, they better reflect their experiences and strengths.



# Our core principles



## Supportive relationships

Relationship-based practice is at the core of our approach and we promote strong, consistent, and trusted relationships between young people and their carers, social workers, and support networks. Positive relationships are the foundation for personal growth and development.

addresses the diverse and individual needs of our cared for and care experienced young people. This includes all areas, from basic skills to mental health services, educational support, housing assistance, and access to meaningful employment and training opportunities.

## Advocacy and participation

We champion the rights of our care experienced young people, empowering them to participate actively in decisions that affect their lives. We are dedicated to amplifying their voices and ensuring they help shape policies and services that impact their wellbeing. In addition, they will always have the support of an

## Holistic support

We recognise and celebrate the individuality of each of our children, and we are committed to understanding their individual strengths and needs. To support them on their journey, we will provide comprehensive support that

Independent Reviewing Officer who will hold all professionals to account, and they will always have access to independent advocacy if they need it.

We are committed to meaningful co-production and working in partnership with our children. We will listen to their views and design our services and provision taking into account their recommendations and views. Through the Corporate Parenting Panel and participation groups, we will report back to our children through a 'you said, we did' approach.

## Continuity and stability

We recognise the importance of stability and consistency in the lives of our care experienced young people. We strive to provide safe places to live and minimise disruptions, ensuring that young people have the stability they need to thrive and develop a strong sense of identity. When a move is necessary, we strive to do this in partnership with our young people and to make sure they understand the reasons for the move and, as far as possible, to make them part of the planning.

## Aspirations and achievements

We are committed to helping our care experienced young people realise their full potential by supporting their educational and career aspirations. We provide tailored support, guidance, and opportunities to help them achieve their goals and overcome any barriers they may face. Our participation groups and the 'Walking in Our Shoes' training has told us over the years that the guiding principle of our aspirations for our children should be "would this be good enough for my child?" and we are committed to continue to be guided by this in our practice.

## Our commitment to improvement

This strategy aims to create a caring, inclusive, and supportive environment for care experienced young people in the London Borough of Hillingdon. We know the needs of our children change and the challenges we face evolve. To continue to deliver the best for our children, we remain dedicated to ongoing collaboration, evaluation, and adaptation to ensure that our services continually evolve to meet the changing needs of our children and care experienced young people.



# What is a corporate parent?

Corporate parenting describes the collective responsibility of the council, including elected members, employees, and partner agencies, to provide the highest standard of care and protection for children and young people who are 'looked after' (cared for). This encompasses those for whom the authority has or shares parental responsibility or provides care and accommodation on behalf of their parent. All care experienced children and young people depend on the entire council and its partners to ensure their care, safety, education, and health needs are met in full. For care experienced young adults, this duty extends to providing support and guidance towards independence, up to the age of 25.

Our approach is rooted in being loving, caring, and ambitious for all children we care for and those with care experience. To achieve this, we work collaboratively with young people and their parents (where safe to do so) and also with partners in health, education, housing, and beyond to guarantee that the services on offer are appropriate, responsive, and focused on improving outcomes for every young person.



Central to our Care Strategy is a steadfast commitment to safeguarding children and young people, protecting them from harm, and providing the support needed for them to flourish and reach their full potential. Our children told us the term 'corporate parenting' does not resonate with them, and so we have updated our language to make it more accessible and empowering.

This strategy has been developed to ensure the corporate parenting principles outlined in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 are embedded in our practice. It focuses on achieving the best outcomes, and outlines what we expect of ourselves as corporate parents and what children and young people in our care and those with care experience can expect from us.

## Corporate parenting principles

- To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people.
- To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- To consider the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
- 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.
- To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
- For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

Our values are that all children should grow up and achieve within their own families and networks when it is in their best interests and is safe enough for them to do so. This underpins our mission to ensure that all children and young people have access to the right services at the right time.

For further details, visit [www.gov.uk/government/publications/applying-corporate-parenting-principles-to-looked-after-children-and-care-leavers](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/applying-corporate-parenting-principles-to-looked-after-children-and-care-leavers).

### What it means to be in care (cared for children) - The Law

In Hillingdon, a child or young person is a **cared for child** when they are provided with accommodation or are subject to a care order under the Children Act 1989. There are three main routes into care:

- **Care orders:** Made by the courts under Section 31 of the Children Act 1989, where the local authority is granted parental responsibility.
- **Voluntary accommodation:** Under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, where parents or those with parental responsibility agree for the child to be accommodated by the local authority (or when a child is lost, abandoned or the person who has been caring for the child is being prevented from providing suitable accommodation or care).
- **Youth justice system:** Since 2013, all young people remanded into custody are supported as cared for children.

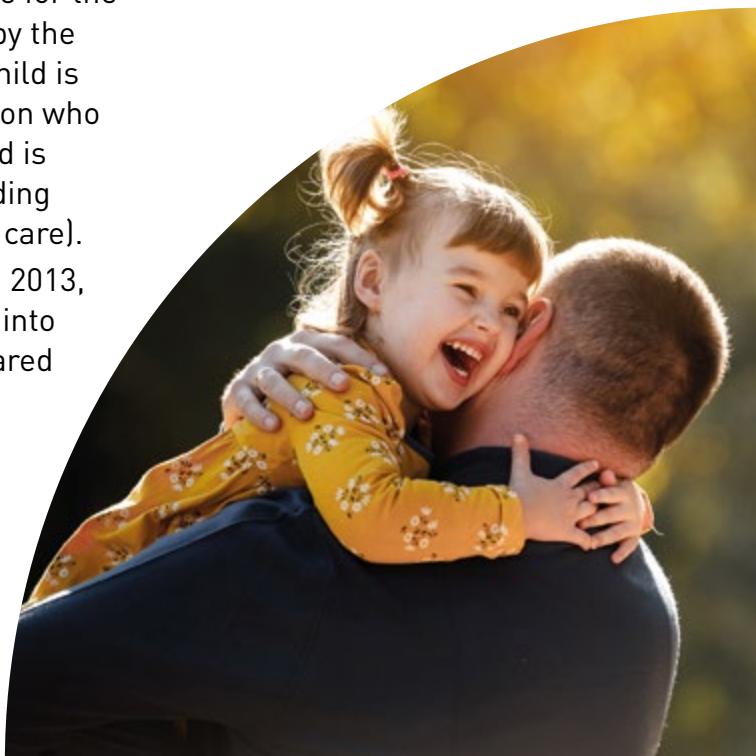
The term 'children looked after' has a specific legal meaning based on the Children Act 1989. A child is looked after by a local authority if they have been provided with accommodation for a continuous period of more than 24 hours, in the

circumstances set out in sections 20 and 21 of the Children Act 1989 or is placed in the care of a local authority by an order made under part IV of the Act.

### What it means to be a care experienced young person – The Law

A **care experienced** young person is someone who has been cared for by a local authority for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and was in care on or after their sixteenth birthday. In Hillingdon, care experienced young people are supported in line with national legislation and local policy. Their status is defined as follows:

- **Eligible child:** Aged 16 or 17, still in care, and has been cared for for at least 13 weeks since turning 14.
- **Relevant child:** Aged 16 or 17, no longer in care, but was previously an eligible child.
- **Former relevant child:** Aged 18 to 25 (or beyond if in education or training) and was previously an eligible or relevant child.





- **Qualifying young person:** Aged 16 to 21 (or 25 if in education/training), who was cared for or accommodated but for less than 13 weeks or was subject to a Special Guardianship Order after the age of 16.

All eligible and former relevant care leavers in Hillingdon are entitled to:

- a **Pathway Plan** tailored to their needs and aspirations
- a named **personal adviser (PA)** to provide ongoing support
- **financial assistance** to help with living, education, and training costs.

The Children Act 1989 and 2004 requires local authorities to provide all eligible care leavers with a Pathway Plan and both a PA and ongoing financial assistance. In May 2013, the government published further guidance for local authorities with regards to arrangements for facilitating care leavers to 'stay put' in their foster placements after they reach the age of 18 years.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 extended the right for former relevant

young people to request continued support from a PA up to their 25th birthday. This entitlement is reflected in Hillingdon's Local Offer for care experienced young people.

### What it means to be an unaccompanied child seeking asylum

Hillingdon is a Port of Entry (PoE) local authority, which means we are often the first point of contact for children and young people arriving in the UK without a parent or carer. As a result, we see a high number of unaccompanied children seeking asylum entering our care.

These children and young people have often experienced significant trauma, hardship, and displacement due to conflict, persecution, or exploitation in their countries of origin. Their journeys to the UK vary, some may have travelled with the help of agents via air or road, while others may have been smuggled, trafficked, or hidden in vehicles, boats, or shipping containers.



Hillingdon Council works closely with the Home Office and Department for Education to support the NTS and ensure that unaccompanied children are placed in safe, appropriate settings.

To meet the needs of newly arrived children, we have developed a Reception and Safe Care model, which includes access to residential children's homes, supported accommodation, and reception centres. These services are registered with Ofsted and provide a safe and supportive environment while longer-term placements are arranged.

Upon arrival, they are considered extremely vulnerable, as they typically have no identified parent or family member to provide care or protection. This makes them particularly at risk of exploitation, trafficking, offending, and ill health.

Hillingdon Council has a statutory duty to safeguard and support these children. They are treated as cared for children under the Children Act 1989 and are supported in line with our corporate parenting responsibilities. Where a young person's age is uncertain, the local authority may carry out an age assessment to determine the appropriate level of care and support.

## National Transfer Scheme (NTS)

To ensure a fair and balanced approach across the country, the government introduced the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) in 2016. Initially voluntary, the scheme became mandatory in 2021.

Under the current arrangements:

- local authorities with a proportion of unaccompanied children seeking asylum above the set threshold percentage of their total cared for children population can refer children for transfer.
- local authorities below the set threshold percentage are legally required to accept transfers.

# Vulnerabilities of children and young people in care

## Exploitation

In Hillingdon, we recognise that cared for children and care experienced young people may be more vulnerable to exploitation due to their lived experiences. Our Children's Social Care teams, including the transition to adulthood service, work in close partnership with safeguarding colleagues and the Safeguarding Partnership Board across children's and adult's services to protect children and young people from all forms of exploitation and abuse. This includes criminal, sexual, financial, online and any other form of exploitation.



## Children who go missing

Children and young people who go missing from care are at heightened risk of harm, including exploitation, substance misuse, and violent crime. Hillingdon follows its Missing Children Protocol, ensuring that every child or young person is offered a return home conversation within 72 hours of their return. For care experienced young people, PAs monitor and support young people who go missing, ensuring their needs are addressed. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who go missing are robustly tracked by the 18+ team, with regular liaison with the police and the Home Office to locate and safeguard those who are long-term missing.

## Child sexual exploitation (CSE)

Hillingdon's multi-agency safeguarding partnership prioritises the identification and protection of children and young people at risk of CSE. We have embedded training, tools, and data analysis to support practitioners in recognising and responding to CSE. Foster carers and residential colleagues

receive targeted training and support to recognise, address and prevent CSE. Our Practice Framework includes multi-agency workshops to strengthen our collective response to exploitation.

## Contextual safeguarding

We are committed to understanding and responding to extra-familial harm, including serious youth violence and exploitation in the community. Through the Children Safeguarding Partnership contextual safeguarding strategy and our contextual safeguarding approach, we work with partners, such as the Police, Youth Justice, Community Safety, and the Violence Reduction Unit to identify and respond to risks in specific locations and peer groups. Multi-agency panels assess and manage complex situations, including those that cross borough boundaries.

We take an active part in Multi-Agency Risk Outside the Home (MAROTH) groups and governance structure that brings together partners from children's services, police, health, education, and community safety. Its purpose is to coordinate responses to harm outside

the home, ensuring that high-risk and complex cases involving adolescents are managed effectively.

Innovative engagement projects, such as pop-up football events and community guardianship initiatives, help create safe spaces for young people.

### Reachable moments

In partnership with health services, we are exploring opportunities to engage young people at critical points, such as presentations at A&E, where they may be more open to support following incidents of violence or exploitation. These 'reachable moments' are key to early intervention and safeguarding.

### Preventing radicalisation

As corporate parents, we are committed to safeguarding children and young people from radicalisation and extremism. All staff and foster carers complete mandatory Prevent training. We work with key partners including the police, health, and the Home Office to deliver the Prevent strategy, which focuses on:

- challenging extremist ideologies
- supporting vulnerable individuals
- strengthening institutional resilience to radicalisation.

### Modern slavery

Cared for children and young people, particularly unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, may be at risk of trafficking and modern slavery. Hillingdon Council adheres to the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and ensures that all staff are trained to identify and respond to concerns. Any child transported for exploitative

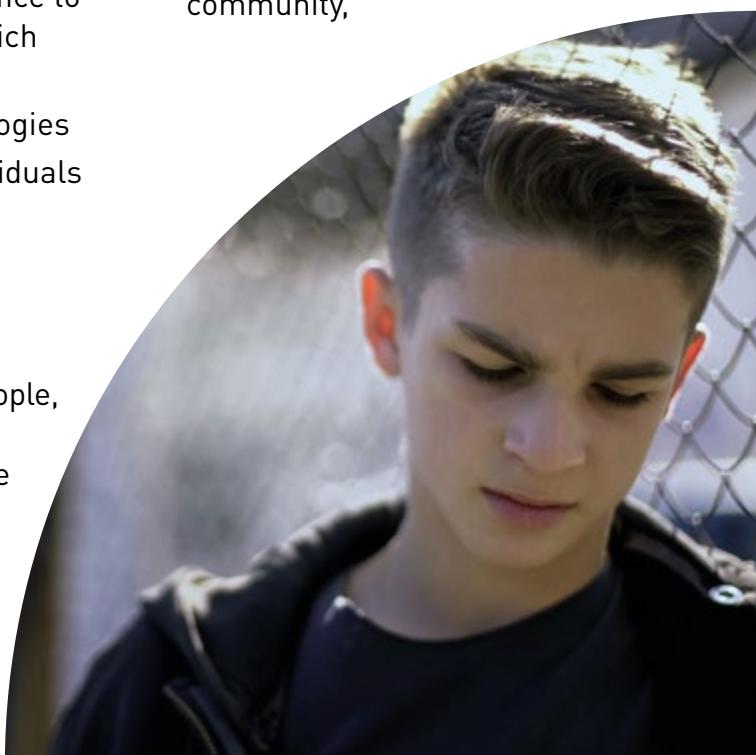
purposes is considered a victim of trafficking. Our procedures ensure swift safeguarding responses and access to support.

### Youth justice

We recognise the vulnerability of our cared for children and care experienced young people in relation to offending. We work closely with the police and Youth Justice Service to prevent unnecessary criminalisation. We promote restorative and diversionary approaches and expect carers to manage behaviour without involving the police unless necessary. When a young person does offend, we ensure a coordinated support plan is in place, including transition planning for those leaving custody, to promote rehabilitation and reduce reoffending.

### Caring for children who need help

Sometimes, children and young people go through difficult times at home. We have different ways to help, like giving support to families, helping in the community,



or finding a new safe place for a child to live if needed. We only take children into care when it's important for their safety and wellbeing.

## Keeping children safe

If a child or young person is not safe at home, we may have to use our legal powers to move them away from their home to keep them safe. When this happens, we act quickly and carefully to make sure they are cared for properly. We make sure the process is handled in a child-centred manner and without unnecessary delays. We plan carefully with the ambition that every young person can have a stable and long-term place to live where they are happy and belong.

We promise to try to find someone in their family or someone they know well to care for them, so they can stay close to the people they love. We believe that staying connected to familiar people, community and friends is important for a young person's wellbeing, identity and their future.

## Support after leaving care

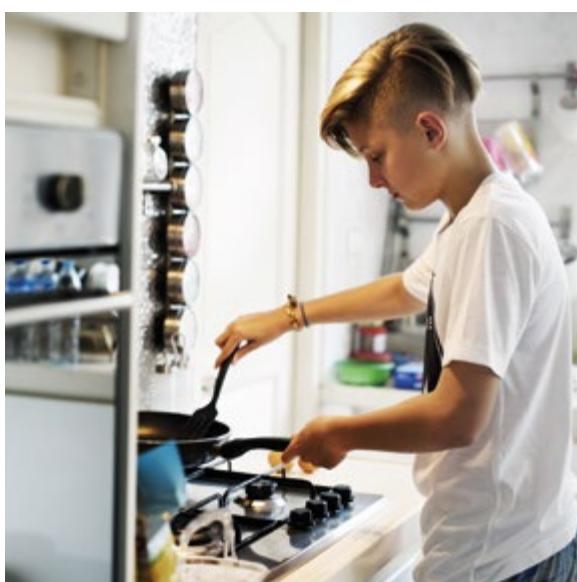
When young people leave care, we are here to support them in building a positive future. We want every care experienced young person to feel confident, supported, and ready to take on adult life. That is why we continue offering help and guidance until they are 25.

We will make sure young people have the practical skills they need to live independently, like managing money, finding a place to live, staying healthy, and knowing how to access support with jobs, education, benefits, and other services.

We also work with families, trusted adults, and other organisations to make sure young people feel safe at home, in their communities, and in places like school or college. We want them to build strong, trusting relationships that last.

Most importantly, we always listen to what young people have to say. Their views matter at every stage of planning and decision-making. We make sure they are heard, involved, and kept informed, because their voice is central to everything we do as their corporate parent.

After the age of 21, young people may choose not to engage with us or feel they wish to be fully independent. But, as a good parent, we will continue to be here and make sure they know how to contact us when the going gets tough, and we will ensure that all our young people know how to reach us when they need us.



# Our local context

(Based on data as of 31 March 2025, unless stated otherwise)

- Hillingdon Council acted as corporate parent to **312** cared for children and **602** care experienced young people (18 to 25 years old).
- Among the total cared for children, **52** were unaccompanied children seeking asylum (UCSA), accounting for **17%** of the cared for children's population.
- Of those children cared for on 31 March 2025:
  - **38%** were White
  - **25%** were Black or Black British
  - **14%** were Asian or Asian British
  - **11%** were of Mixed ethnicities
  - **11%** were from Other ethnicities.

## Where children live

- Of the cared for children at the end of the year, **8.3%** had three or more placements during the year.

- **47%** of our cared for children are placed with foster carers.
- **10.3%** are in residential children's homes, including Hillingdon's own resource.

## Care experienced young people

- **80%** are in suitable accommodation. There were **167** young people (**84** cared for children and **83** care experienced young people) living in fully accredited and checked supported accommodation.
- **57%** are engaged in full-time education, employment, or training.
- **7%** of the above group are pursuing higher education.
- **12** young people are living in staying put arrangements
- **47** young people are residing within the Staying Close project.



# Our pledge

## Our promises to our children



### Help and support to stay safe and healthy

We are committed to ensuring every child and young person in our care feels safe, secure, and supported in maintaining their physical and emotional wellbeing. We provide access to skilled carers and professionals trained in trauma-informed approaches and work closely with health partners to offer regular health checks, timely referrals, and support tailored to individual needs. Our ongoing relationship with health services ensures that young people have access to the right advice, activities, and services to help them lead healthy, fulfilling lives. We are always here to offer guidance and a listening ear, whenever it is needed.

### What we do for cared for children

- All our foster carers and residential care workers are trained in PACE (a parenting programme Playful, Accepting, Curious and Empathetic) and social workers are trained in

trauma-informed practice to enable them to support our children's emotional wellbeing.

- Our social workers have access to the specialist Multi-Agency Psychology Service (MAPS), which supports decision-making regarding children and young people through an attachment-focused approach.
- The Strengths and Difficulties Score is used to assess children's wellbeing. Children with a score of 17 or higher are automatically referred to MAPS. Those who score between 14 and 17 are considered for additional support.
- Young people with complex health needs have support from the Hillingdon Transition Service for 14 to 19-year-olds moving from care to adulthood.
- Every child and young person is provided with an annual health assessment to ensure their physical and emotional wellbeing needs are

assessed and addressed. Those children under five years of age will receive assessments twice a year.

- We remain committed to collaborating closely with health professionals and partner agencies to promote the health and wellbeing of our children.
- All our cared for children are encouraged and supported to engage in extracurricular activities to support their social skills, self-esteem, and emotional wellbeing.

### What we will do for our care experienced young people

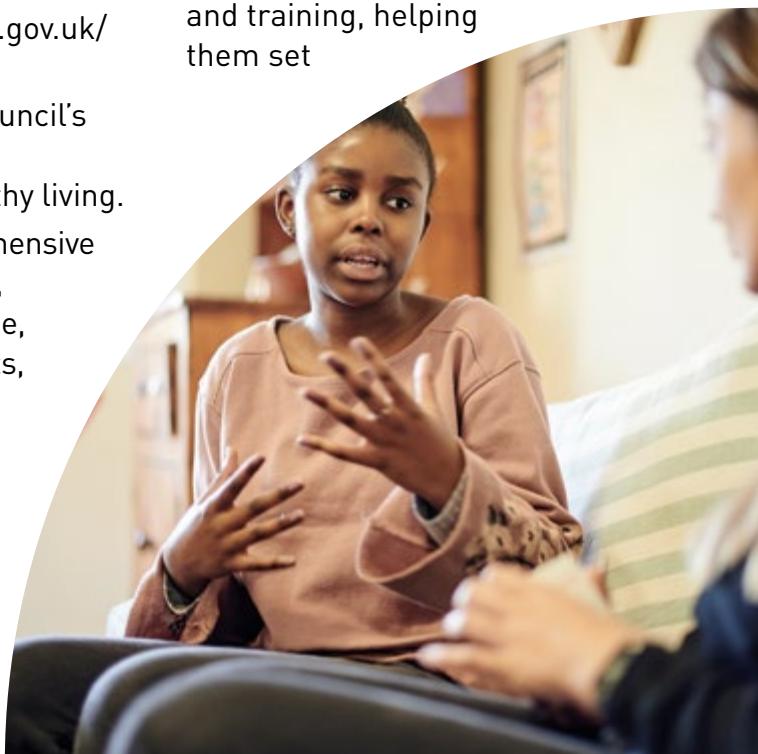
- We provide ongoing support for our care experienced young people up to the age of 25. They can contact us via email or telephone for support and advice.
- Our children (aged 13 to 24) have priority access to services offered by the Youth Offer including Link Counselling  [careandsupport.hillingdon.gov.uk/Services/2244](http://careandsupport.hillingdon.gov.uk/Services/2244), sexual health and wellbeing programme (KISS)  [www.hillingdon.gov.uk/sexual-health](http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/sexual-health) and SORTED  [www.hillingdon.gov.uk/substance-misuse](http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/substance-misuse).
- We offer discounts at the council's gyms to improve health and wellbeing and promote healthy living.
- ASK JAN provides a comprehensive range of supportive services, including a dedicated helpline, recreational activity discounts, and up to six in-person counselling sessions.

### What we are working on

- In partnership with health organisations, we are committed to providing young people transitioning from care with access to essential information, including their medical history, immunisation records, ongoing healthcare requirements, and other pertinent details.
- Multi-disciplinary transitions surgeries to plan adult health and social care for young people after 18, addressing both physical and emotional needs.
- All our young people are reviewed by our transitions panel from the age of 17 to facilitate a coordinated approach with our Adult Social Care teams and to ensure that the transition process is smooth and timely.

### Support through education and planning for the future

Education is at the heart of unlocking a bright future, and we are committed to supporting our care experienced young people every step of the way. We guide them through school, college, and training, helping them set



realistic goals and celebrating their achievements. Working closely with the Virtual School and our partners, we offer practical advice on career choices, apprenticeships, further and higher education, ensuring each of our young people receive the guidance and support they need.

Our team collaborates with educators and employers to provide information about grants, bursaries, university life, and training opportunities. We also supply resources, such as laptops, for those continuing their studies and create tailored apprenticeship opportunities just for our care experienced young people. By working together, we empower every young person to make informed decisions about their future and help them plan for success.

We recognise the critical role that education plays in the lives of our children and how this supports both learning and safeguarding. The Education team is our fourth statutory partner in our Safeguarding Partnership, and plays a key role in planning and decision-making that promotes learning, education and safeguarding.

### **Hillingdon Virtual School**

Hillingdon Virtual School is here for our children from early years right through to when they leave care, no matter where they live or go to school. The school works with other teams to make sure our children get the support they need, especially if they have additional learning needs or disabilities.

The team makes sure children and young people have access to good schools, training, or college courses. It also monitors their attendance, progress, and achievements, and makes sure Personal Education Plan (PEP) suits their learning style and goals.

### **What the Virtual School do for children we care for**

- All children and young people under our care will be assigned a designated representative from the Virtual School to support them if they are not engaged in education, employment, or training (NEET), and to assist in preparing them for educational or employment opportunities.
- We will ensure that their care plan is regularly reviewed alongside their PEP.
- They organise residential trips (like to Jamie's Farm) and enrichment activities to help our children build friendships and confidence.
- They can provide the relevant tools to ensure that our children's education is promoted, such as laptops to facilitate learning.

### **For all care experienced young people**

- They support our young people beyond school age with their education.
- They support our care experienced young people, both within and outside Hillingdon, to access college and university opportunities.
- They offer comprehensive information regarding university life, including details on grants, bursaries, and expectations for their academic experience.
- They offer laptops to our young people who have been in education for over 12 weeks after school age to support them with their studies.
- They support our young people claiming asylum to learn English through ESOL courses.
- They offer financial help with university applications and student finance.
- They have created apprenticeship opportunities just for our care experienced young people, and support with interview preparation.

- They will offer guidance to assist our young people in finding and securing employment that aligns with their skills and interests.

### What they are working on

- Enhancing methods for monitoring progress to ensure timely intervention when support is required for our children or young people, as well as to acknowledge their achievements as they occur in real time.
- Collaborating with other services to make sure everyone understands their role and works well together.
- Raising our levels of challenge to schools in tackling any low expectations or lack of ambition for our cared for children and care experienced young people
- Introducing an early years-specific PEP for two, three and four-year-olds, ensuring their individual educational needs are identified, supported, and monitored closely.
- Developing a post-16 model as a PEP through consultation with our care experienced young people, those in our care, and formally through the Children in Care Council.
- Continuing to support our young people after they leave our care to further their aspirations in education, training, and employment.

### Celebrate achievements

We recognise and celebrate the successes of our children and young people, big or small. Whether it's academic accomplishments, personal milestones, or acts of kindness and resilience, we make sure to acknowledge and reward their efforts. Celebrating achievements helps build self-esteem and a sense of belonging, and we are proud to share in their joys and support them through challenges.



### What we do for our cared for children

- Acknowledgement of school achievements at every PEP meeting.
- Discussion at Looked After Children's reviews about personal achievements.
- Nominate our children and young people for external and internal awards.

### What we do for our care experienced young people

Every year, we celebrate the achievements of our cared for children and care experienced young people at the annual Kids in Care Awards (KICA). This is Hillingdon's flagship event to honour the achievements of cared for children and care experienced young people. It's a vibrant, youth-led event that grows every year, attended by hundreds of children and carers, supported by staff and elected members who volunteer their time to celebrate the achievements of our children. Any professional working with our care experienced children and young people



can nominate them for a KICA. They will then be invited to the annual event that features:

- **a red carpet ceremony** with awards presented by civic leaders such as the Mayor and senior council officers
- **fun activities** like bouncy castles, face painting, magicians, stilt walkers, caricature artists, and interactive games
- **mocktails, food trucks, and gift bags**, all curated with input from our young people themselves
- **participation** – year-on-year we receive several nominations for our children, with 2025 having a record-breaking 927 nominations.

### Participation and voice in celebration

It is also about empowerment:

- the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and Youth Voice Forum shape services, events, and training like 'Walking in Our Shoes'
- our young people contribute to staff recruitment, the SEND strategy, and community safety projects like 'Making Hayes Safer'
- their input influences events, such as Pride and Eid, ensuring cultural relevance and inclusivity.



### Listen and involve children and young people in decisions about their lives

We believe the voices of our children and young people are central to everything we do. We make it a priority to listen, involve them in planning, and keep them informed at every stage. Their views shape our services and decisions, ensuring the support provided truly meets their needs and wishes. We encourage open dialogue and provide opportunities for young people to express themselves, knowing their opinions are valued and respected. We strive to always achieve a meaningful co-production with our young people and make them our partners in decision-making and in shaping the future of the service.

To do this, we use different ways to engage such as:

- assessments
- co-production and sharing of Care Plans
- child-centred PEPs
- participation in Child Looked After Reviews and support to chair them if they so choose
- various participation groups
- co-production of our strategies and models of working
- involvement in our interview panels for appointments at all levels
- continued training of all our staff and across partnership including the Walking in Our Shoes training
- health assessments completed with consent and in partnership
- fostering or adoption records (if these apply)
- pathway planning developed and agreed together depending on the individual's strengths and needs
- compliments and complaints.

Our children and young people's views matter, and we will make sure they are written down and taken seriously.



If our children and young people feel they need additional support to get their voice heard, they have access to an independent advocate to consult with, represent their views and/or advocate on their behalf.

In all we do, we remain committed to gathering feedback and really listening to what we are told and thus ensuring that the voice of our children and young people is heard and they are meaningfully involved in the decisions and plans we make about services and about their lives.

### **Help all children feel they belong**

We want every child and young person to feel accepted, included, and proud of who they are. Our approach is centred on creating a warm, supportive environment where everyone feels at home, valued, and connected to those around them.

By nurturing trusting relationships and supporting each young person's sense of identity, we help them to understand their own story and what 'family' means to them now and in the years ahead. We encourage children to stay connected to people who matter most, whether that's family, siblings, friends, or supportive adults, and we make sure to involve them in decisions about how these

important relationships are maintained.

We recognise that friends, siblings, and PAs often provide vital support, so we actively help children and young people to build and maintain these strong relationships. At the same time, we celebrate cultural identity and promote participation in community and extracurricular activities, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to feel a true sense of belonging.

By consistently checking in and listening to our children and young people, we strive to make sure their needs are met and that their voices are at the heart of our care planning. In doing so, we help them to feel secure, confident, and connected to a community that truly values them.

### **What we will do for our cared for children**

- Facilitate Family Group Conferences with families as early as possible and assist them in identifying other potential family members who could provide care if children are unable to remain at home.
- Support and promote strong family relationships and help our children stay connected in a way that is right for them.
- Provide foster carers with greater support for teenagers and ensure every child enjoys a stable home life.
- Support children in understanding their experience in care through direct work, the use of words and pictures, life story books, and letters.
- Helping those who need extra support to navigate their identity.
- Ensure children have access to those who can provide support, such as befrienders and advocates.
- Help and encourage our children to build strong support networks, so they feel confident and connected as they grow into adulthood.
- Hold placement stability meetings to proactively address and prevent

placement disruptions and breakdowns.

- Proactively evaluate the potential for reunification with birth parents when it is safe, appropriate, aligns with the expressed wishes and feelings of our children, and is supported by our assessment as being in their best interests.
- When it is necessary for children to move homes, we will implement parallel planning whenever possible to determine the most suitable home and minimise delays in securing a school place, ensuring both transitions are coordinated effectively.
- Collaborate with schools to ensure each of our children has access to a trusted individual for support.
- Invite our cared for children and care experienced young people to participate in organised events and activities, such as summer BBQs, Eid celebrations, and Christmas gatherings, providing opportunities to connect with their peers.

### **What we will do for our care experienced young people**

- Provide stable housing during term time to ensure that our young people with care experience can maintain stability while pursuing their education.
- Our care experienced young people are supported in their new tenancies with a Setting up Home Allowance and outreach support from our providers.
- The right home and right care will be made through careful matching and support including providing a 'Staying Close' home following a needs-led assessment.

### **What we are working on**

- To provide a choice of home and for our young people to be involved in the selection of the right home for them.
- To develop clear processes for input



into decisions regarding placement moves in order that educational provision is considered a priority.

- To continue to recruit foster carers who can meet the needs of our children and young people and support them to be matched on a long-term basis.
- Building new residential homes in Hillingdon so as many children as possible can stay living in the borough, close to their communities, families, schools and local services.
- Enabling foster families to support each other and their children through the Mockingbird Programme.
- Collaborating with housing services to support transition to adulthood and assisting with securing and maintaining tenancy.
- Collaborating with housing providers to offer a broader selection of housing options for our care experienced young people, including YMCA, shared housing, and semi-independent accommodations, determined by a needs-led assessment.
- Continue to work closely with schools to increase their understanding of the care journey, through training, advice, advocacy and guidance.

## Ensure young people feel fully prepared for transition into adulthood

We aim to prepare young people for adulthood as a journey, recognising that developing independence is a gradual process. Our support continues up to the age of 25, ensuring that each young person has access to assistance as they navigate this important transition. By teaching essential life skills, such as budgeting, cooking, and independent living, we equip young people with practical tools for everyday life.

The transition from care to independence is a significant milestone. Through our Transition to Adulthood service, we aim to build confidence, resilience, and the necessary skills for successful adulthood. Our guidance extends to areas including health, employment, and housing, ensuring young people are ready to face a range of challenges. Support and advice remain available beyond the age of 21, so young people know they can seek reassurance or guidance whenever needed.

We recognise the unique needs and experiences of care experienced young people. Our approach centres on listening to their views and adapting our support to fit their circumstances and ambitions. We are committed to breaking down barriers, reducing adversity, and enabling young people to achieve their goals in their own time and on their own terms.

### Key objectives

What we want, is for our care experienced young people to:

- experience a smooth transition into adulthood and have the same opportunities and outcomes as their peers
- have access to high quality, consistent support up to the age of 25
- have access to education, employment and training (EET) opportunities

- have access to safe, affordable and stable accommodation
- be safe and know how to keep themselves safe
- be healthy and have a good level of emotional and physical wellbeing
- build independence through the development of practical life skills
- maintain and develop positive relationships and build social inclusion.

### How do we achieve these in practice?

#### Allocation of a PA

Each care experienced young person is assigned a PA from the age of 16 who remains a consistent contact point until they reach 21 and then ongoing support is provided by the service until the age of 25 if needed. Our PAs are passionate about advocating for our care experienced young people and will work to form a positive relationship with the young adults they are supporting.

#### Pathway planning

From the age of 16, all young people are given the opportunity to choose their PA, ensuring their support is tailored to their preferences. At this stage, every young person is dual allocated with both a PA and a social worker, providing comprehensive guidance and support up to the age of 18. Each young person will



be provided with a clear Pathway Plan which they are encouraged to co-produce that is reviewed regularly. The plan will identify goals and the support needed to achieve them. We want to ensure all young people have a clear plan before they turn 18, including key partners such as Adult Social Care and Health where necessary.

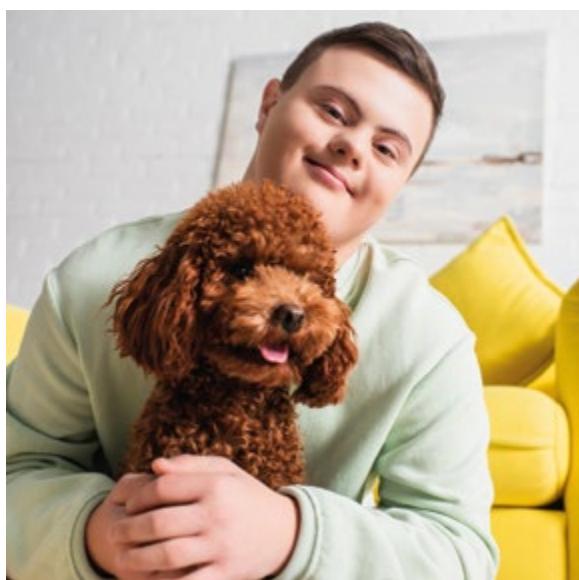
#### **Housing and accommodation:**

We provide access to a range of accommodation options, including supported lodgings, semi-independent living, Staying Close, staying put arrangements and help accessing social housing or private renting such as houses of multiple occupation (HMOs) or shared accommodation.

We encourage and facilitate staying put arrangements, allowing young people to remain with their foster carers beyond age 18 where appropriate.

We have the Staying Close programme for young people who need some additional support post-18 and a referral to Hillingdon Transition Panel when young people have identified care and support needs.

We know that sourcing suitable accommodation, which meets the needs of care experienced young people is challenging in London. This is due to the national and local shortage of housing.



That is another reason why we keep this as one of our ongoing priorities for our young people and we work in partnership with all our colleagues to ensure all our care experienced young people can access suitable and affordable accommodation within a clear housing pathway.

#### **Be safe**

We want all our young people to feel safe in their homes and communities. The Transition to Adulthood service will identify vulnerable young people and engage them in developing a personal safety plan. We will develop further the relationships with local community groups and run workshops to engage young people in discussing issues around how to keep themselves safe.

#### **Practical support and life skills**

We know our young people do not always feel ready for independence. We will work to ensure all young people have the help they need to develop key essential living skills, such as cooking, cleaning, budgeting and managing their money. We will engage with the homes where young people are living prior to turning 18 to ensure these skills are being taught in preparation for independence.

#### **Relationships and inclusion**

We seek for all our young people to feel part of a community and a sense of belonging. We offer opportunities for our young people to socialise and develop relationships such as a weekly football group, summer residential, summer BBQ and KICA. We would like to expand and develop our offer for social activities and groups to promote social inclusion for our care experienced young people.

#### **What we have done**

- Successfully extended our PA service to young people leaving our care up to the age of 25.
- Supported care experienced young people to remain with their foster



carer through our staying put initiative to receive continued support in a family environment.

- Developed the Staying Close pathway to ensure those young people who need additional support prior to moving into independence will have that option.

### Key challenges and priorities

Our ongoing objective is to enhance accommodation pathways for care experienced young people. However, further action is required. Like other London boroughs, securing sustainable housing in Hillingdon continues to present significant challenges.

### What we will do

- Ensure that our children and young people are supported and prepared to live and thrive in their own accommodation.
- Our young people who are eligible for adult services will be identified early and have a planned transition from Children's to Adult Social Care.
- Assist our young people to develop

good support networks and sustain significant relationships to reduce the impact of loneliness, isolation, or lack of confidence as they grow into adulthood.

- Build robust processes for monitoring and evaluation around employment, education and training (EET), accommodation and health.
- Increase engagement with our care experienced young people to gather service feedback and ensure co-production.
- Auditing of Pathway Plans to ensure consistency across the services.
- Increase partnership working and develop key relationships with health, housing, education, employers, and voluntary and community sector organisations.
- Review the joint housing protocol to ensure there are clear pathways that are well communicated and understood and to look at developing a care leavers' pathway.

# Hillingdon's Local Offer

We have a Local Offer for our care experienced young people which is published and promoted so our young people know what support is available and how to access it. The Local Offer provides a comprehensive range of support and benefits aimed at helping them transition smoothly into adulthood. The offer includes financial assistance, accommodation options, health and wellbeing support, and educational opportunities. These include but are not limited to:

## Financial support

- Weekly funds matching Universal Credit for those without access to public funds.
- Setting-up-home allowance of up to £3,000.
- A fully-funded travelcard for those living in London.
- A bursary of £2,000 over three to four years for university students.
- Financial support for driving lessons up until the age of 21.
- Emergency cash and food vouchers up to £30 a year.
- Assistance with vital documents like passports and driving licences.
- Coverage of up to 50 per cent of naturalisation fees for non-British citizens.
- Funding for interview clothes and travel costs.
- Financial assistance for travelling to asylum interviews.
- Birthday bonus of £100 for those turning 18.
- Matching Child Benefit and Universal Credit payments for parents without access to public funds.

We are reviewing our finance policy to ensure that this is straightforward and easy for young people to access and

understand what financial support they are entitled to once they leave care.

## Housing and accommodation

- 'Staying put' allows our care experienced young people to remain in their foster homes after turning 18.
- 'Staying Close' offers support for our care experienced young people who want to live independently but still need some short-term assistance to get them there.
- Social housing registration at the age of 18, with help exploring private rentals and applying for Discretionary Housing Payment.
- Support for moving back with family, including Family Group Conferences.
- Safe, affordable accommodation with YMCA/P3 support, where there is an assessed need.
- During non-term time whilst studying at university, we can cover up to 13 weeks rent.
- Tailored support for those with learning disabilities or complex needs.
- Council tax exemption for our care experienced young people up to the age of 21, with a needs-led assessment for exemption for anyone aged between 21 and 25.

## Health and wellbeing

- Free dental and eye care for those aged under 19 and in full-time education or receiving benefits.
- Assistance with applying for free prescriptions.
- Support from the Hillingdon Transition Service for 14 to 19-year-olds moving from care to adulthood.
- Mental health support through various services, including drama therapy, wellbeing sessions, and confidential advice for drug and alcohol issues.

- ASK JAN offers a variety of supportive services, including a single contact helpline, discounts on recreational activities, and up to six in-person counselling sessions.
- Health colleagues are leading on formulating a Health Passport and it is a priority for the newly appointed Transition Nurse.

## Education and employment

- Tailored advice and guidance from Hillingdon Virtual School up until the age of 25.
- Support for exploring further and higher education, apprenticeships, and employment opportunities.
- Access to employment support for young people with special needs.
- Financial support for higher education through UCAS and student finance.
- Additional support from organisations like Buttle UK, Propel UK, Catch22, and Drive Forward Foundation.
- A laptop allowance of £420 is available to keep young people connected and to promote their educational journey. Up to £150 a year is also provided for essential learning tools.

By providing these resources, we aim to ensure that our care experienced young people have the necessary tools to thrive and become the best version of themselves. Increased awareness and accessibility is still high on our agenda and we aim to promote the Local Offer more effectively to ensure all our care experienced young people are aware of the support available to them. By continuously improving and adapting our Local Offer, we strive to provide the best possible support for our

young people, helping them transition smoothly into adulthood and achieve their full potential.

This information is regularly updated to ensure our care experienced young people receive the best level of support. The link below provides the latest updates and will be reviewed and revised regularly over the next five years. Updates will take place in collaboration with our young people, through co-production, in response to government changes, and to ensure services continuously improve and demonstrate evidence of genuine co-production. As a result, specific details may change as services evolve.

For more information, visit  
 [www.hillingdon.gov.uk/care-leavers](http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/care-leavers).



# Corporate Parenting Panel

Hillingdon's Corporate Parenting Panel provides strategic leadership, oversight and scrutiny to ensure that our cared for children and care experienced young people are supported to thrive. It is a key forum for accountability, co-production, and continuous improvement across services. The panel is co-chaired by elected members and our young people.

The Children in Care Councils (CiCCs) directly support the Corporate Parenting Panel to measure and monitor the effectiveness and quality of corporate parenting in Hillingdon. Their purpose is to provide young people with a forum to collectively voice their ideas and views; to challenge our care and support; influence service improvements and drive change; contribute to the development of strategic plans and hold their corporate parents to account.

## Children in Care Councils

- Hillingdon has three established and well-attended CiCCs – Talkers, Step Up and Stepping Out – who meet monthly and are part of the regional children in care council network.
- Children and young people have a say in how decisions are made about themselves and their care, and services that affect them. They have



an opportunity to influence those decisions through the children in care councils.

- Our CiCCs have a powerful collective voice. Their views are presented at each Corporate Parenting Panel and at social work team and management meetings. Members of Stepping Out attend and co-chair the Corporate Parenting Panel and meet with our directors every three months.
- Young people participate in the recruitment of staff and foster carers.
- Young people with care experience are members of the Fostering Panel.

## Purpose and responsibilities of the Corporate Parenting Panel

### Voice and influence of children and young people

The panel ensures that our children and young people have regular opportunities to share their experiences and influence decisions about their care. Their views are actively sought and embedded in service development, policy design, and strategic planning.

### Co-production and engagement

Our young people are engaged in shaping services through structured forums and direct participation in the panel. Their contributions inform improvements and ensure that services reflect their lived experiences. Annual reports document the impact of participation, highlighting how the views and experiences of our children and young people have shaped policies and practices. By embedding co-production in our strategic objectives, we have created services that truly reflect the needs and aspirations of those we support.

## Strategic oversight

The panel maintains a strategic overview of all policies, procedures, and initiatives affecting our cared for children and care experienced young people. It ensures alignment with local and national priorities and that services are responsive to the needs of our children and young people.

## Performance monitoring and accountability

The panel receives regular performance reports, including key indicators, complaints and compliments, audit findings, and inspection outcomes. It monitors the quality and effectiveness of services delivered by the council, partners, and commissioned providers, and ensures that action is taken where services fall short.

## Celebrating achievements

The panel highlights and celebrates the achievements of our children and young people by publicly recognising their successes in a variety of ways. This may include sharing their stories and accomplishments during panel meetings, featuring them in annual reports, and organising events or awards to acknowledge their positive outcomes. The panel ensures these achievements are promoted within the council and the wider community, creating a culture of encouragement and aspiration among our children and young people in care. By doing so, the panel not only celebrates individual milestones but also reinforces the value of supporting and empowering young people to reach their full potential.

## Service review and challenge

The panel reviews annual reports from key services including adoption, fostering,

residential care, the Virtual School, and independent reviewing services. It acts as a critical friend, challenging practice and promoting excellence.

## What are we doing?

- Continuing to ensure representation in the panel is diverse and activities are inclusive.
- Ensuring our children and young people continue to be involved in decision making platforms that shape their future.
- Communication between Elected Members and our care experienced young people is facilitated through the CiCCs.
- The needs of our cared for children and care experienced young people is prioritised across the council, led by the Corporate Parenting Panel which listens and responds to these views.
- All policies which impact directly on our children and young people are made available to the CiCC and participation groups for comment and consideration, prior to approval. This enables our children and young people to be key contributors to policy





development and ensures implementation can be considered from their perspective.

- Our children and young people will continue to be involved in the recruitment of staff, training of officers and development of information, such as leaflets and website design.
- Our children and young people will continue to monitor and develop the Children in Care Pledge and Care Experienced Young People's Local Offer.

### Impact measure

- The Corporate Parenting Panel, informed by the working groups and Children's Rights and Participation team will collate a 'You said, we did' register to evidence the changes made as the direct result of the views of young people. This will be reviewed on an ongoing basis to evidence the impact of our young people's views on service development. These changes and input will be implemented by project work undertaken in working groups.
- To ensure our strategy remains dynamic and responsive, robust data collection and quality assurance processes are integral. We are enhancing our approach to monitoring, evaluation, and impact measurement through robust data

collection and quality assurance, which are essential for driving improvement and accountability. We will implement dashboards, regular audits, and feedback loops to monitor outcomes and service quality.

- Performance reports will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel and CiCCs, ensuring transparency and enabling us to celebrate successes and address areas for development. By using data to inform decision-making, we will continuously adapt our services to meet the evolving needs of our children and young people.
- Record policies presented to CiCCs, with records of their feedback and consultation impact.
- Number of completed/reviewed Pathway Plans collaboratively written with our young people.
- Number of young people participating in cared for children reviews and those chairing them.

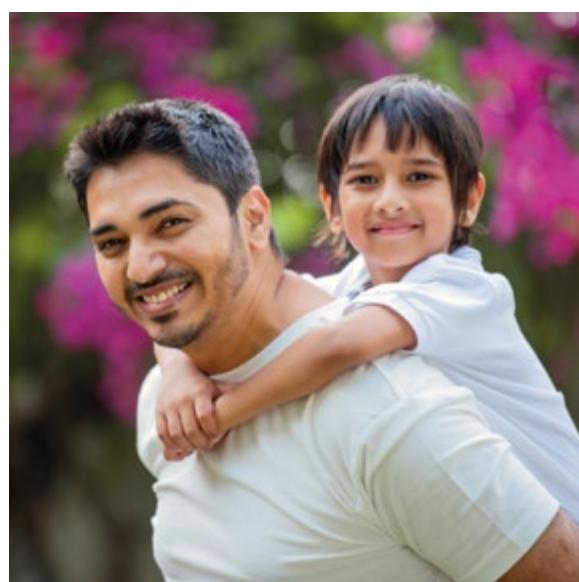
# Future aspirations for children and young people in care

Our priorities are informed by feedback from children and young people, insights gained from inspection activities such as those conducted by Ofsted, and analysis of local data. These aspirations demonstrate our ongoing commitment to enhancing outcomes and experiences for children in our care and care experienced young people in Hillingdon. While significant progress has been made and further work is underway, we continually strive for excellence on behalf of our children and young people. The following summarises key initiatives and ambitions that guide our efforts.

- Early intervention and prevention:** Early intervention is at the heart of our approach to reducing the need for children to enter care. Through strengthened Family Hubs, transformed Family Help services, and Family Group Conferences, we will support families to stay together safely wherever possible. Multi-disciplinary teams will work collaboratively to identify and address issues at the earliest stage, preventing escalation and promoting positive outcomes. Our Families First model will ensure that families receive the right support at the right time, empowering them to overcome challenges and build resilience.
- Kinship care:** We are committed to increasing the number of children cared for within their extended family or connected network. Through early Family Decision Making meetings, we identify potential kinship carers to reduce reliance on mainstream foster placements.
- Unaccompanied children seeking asylum:** We continue to ensure timely transfers through the NTS and

provide tailored support for children as they transition into care and adulthood.

- Homeless 16 and 17-year-olds:** We have updated our response to young people presenting as homeless by providing help at the earliest point and working closely with housing services where this appears to be needed to ensure advocacy and support are in place and will continue to strengthen this area.
- Workforce stability:** To deliver outstanding care and support, we recognise the importance of a stable, skilled, and motivated workforce. Hillingdon Council is committed to investing in the wellbeing and professional development of our staff, including social workers, PAs, and foster carers. We will continue to develop peer support networks, and recognition programmes to celebrate achievements and foster a culture of continuous learning. Our recruitment campaigns will target underrepresented groups and promote flexible working arrangements, ensuring our workforce reflects the diversity of



our community. By prioritising staff wellbeing and career progression, we aim to retain talented professionals and maintain high quality, consistent relationships for our children and young people.

- **Local provision development:** We are expanding our in-house provision, small residential homes, and supported accommodation, to meet the diverse needs of our children locally.
- **Permanency planning:** We support children to return home where safe and appropriate, or to achieve permanency through adoption, special guardianship, or long-term fostering.
- **Foster carer recruitment and retention:** We are increasing the number of foster carers with the right skills across the borough.
- **Placement sufficiency and quality:** Ensuring every one of our children and young people has access to a safe, stable, and local home is central to our strategy. We will develop a formal sufficiency strategy, setting out our current capacity, projected needs, and plans to address gaps in fostering, kinship care, and residential provision. Annual reviews of placement data will inform targeted recruitment campaigns, expansion of the Mockingbird Programme, and enhanced support for kinship carers. By working closely with local providers and housing partners, we will increase the availability of high quality homes within Hillingdon, minimising disruption and promoting continuity for our children and young people.
- **Education, employment and training (EET):** We are increasing access to education, employment, and training opportunities, including apprenticeships across the council, partner agencies, and local businesses.

### • **Youth Justice and Restorative Practice:**

We are enhancing restorative responses for our cared for children who offend, working jointly with Youth Justice and Probation to support rehabilitation and reduce reoffending.

### • **Participation and innovation:**

We are developing creative ways to engage our children and young people, including drop-ins, co-production, and 'you said, we did', to improve access to services and information.

### • **Transitions to adulthood:**

We are strengthening support for our care experienced young people through our transformation of service delivery, including those transitioning to Adult Services, ensuring continuity of care and access to specialist support for disabled young people.

### • **Step Across initiatives:**

We are implementing Step Across to Fostering and Step Across to Supported Homes to reduce reliance on residential care and provide enhanced support to carers within family-based settings.

## Making it happen

We aim to turn our ambitions and aspirations into reality by working closely with our young people and ensuring that they have an active role in informing our strategic objectives. We are committed to working in partnership with our young people and ensuring co-production and collaboration is at the heart of our approach. By embedding young people's voices in decision-making and holding ourselves accountable through robust monitoring and evaluation, we are dedicated to turning our ambitions and aspirations into meaningful, lasting change for every child and young person in Hillingdon.





# CARE STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN AND CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

Committee name	Children, Families & Education Select Committee
Officer reporting	Tehseen Kauser, Director of Children's Social Care Poppy Reddy, Assistant Director of Care, Support and Transition
Papers with report	Care Strategy for Children and Care Experienced Young People
Ward	All

## HEADLINES

This report outlines the strategic framework for improving outcomes for children in care and care experienced young people in Hillingdon. It sets out our statutory responsibilities, local priorities, and proposed actions to strengthen support, stability, and transition pathways. This document represents our commitment to providing the highest level of care, support, and opportunities for young individuals who have experienced the care system. We recognise the unique challenges faced by Cared for Children and Care Experienced young people and firmly believe that every young person deserves the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential, regardless of their past circumstances.

## RECOMMENDATION

**That the Committee notes the strategic direction and priorities outlined in the draft strategy and provides any comments to be included in the report to the Cabinet Member to consider this, in due course.**

*The strategy will be considered by the Cabinet Member in due course.*

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Our strategy supports cared for children and care experienced young people in Hillingdon by focusing on key priorities that address their challenges and promote their success. Developed with input from young people, practitioners, and partners, the strategy follows national guidelines and considers local needs and statutory duties.

**Key themes include:**

### **1. Embedding Participation of Young People**

We are committed to actively involving young people in shaping the services that affect their lives. By embedding their participation at every level, we ensure that practice and service delivery are responsive to their needs and experiences. Regular consultation, feedback mechanisms, and participation forums provide avenues for young people to share their views and influence decisions, making their voices central to our continuous improvement process.

### **2. Improving Placement Stability and Permanence**

Securing stable and permanent placements for young people in our care remains a top priority.

We are dedicated to providing homes that offer a sense of security and belonging, recognising the importance of stability for the wellbeing and development of our young people. Our efforts are focused on reducing placement disruptions and ensuring that every child and young person has access to a supportive and consistent living environment.

### **3. Strengthening Pathways to Achievement and Independence**

We are focused on creating robust pathways that support young people's educational and employment ambitions. By strengthening opportunities for achievement and independence, we aim to equip care experienced young people with the skills, qualifications, and confidence needed to succeed in further education, training, and the workplace.

### **4. Promoting Health and Wellbeing**

The promotion of both emotional and physical health is a cornerstone of our strategy. We are committed to enhancing access to health services, ensuring that young people receive the support they need to maintain their wellbeing. This includes targeted interventions and timely access to mental health resources, as well as initiatives that encourage healthy lifestyles and positive relationships.

### **5. Supported Transition to Adulthood**

A timely and well-supported transition to adulthood is vital for care experienced young people as they move towards independence. We provide focused support and tailored services to help young people navigate this critical period, ensuring they are prepared for the challenges and opportunities of adult life. This includes practical assistance, ongoing guidance, and continued emotional support as they establish themselves beyond the care system.

Feedback from young people on the strategy and our offer to cared for children has been positive with one young person stating, ***"I couldn't remember anything else to be written because every time I thought of something to write or something you offer I found it in the pages after."***

## **PERFORMANCE DATA**

To ensure the effectiveness of the Care Strategy for Children and Care Experienced Young People, a range of performance measures and feedback mechanisms will be utilised. These will enable the Council and its partners to monitor progress and continuously improve service delivery for the benefit of cared for children and care experienced young people in Hillingdon.

### **Placement Stability and Transitions**

We will monitor the stability of placements for our children in care, aiming to ensure that they are settled in secure and supportive environments. A key objective is to facilitate their successful transition into independence, providing the necessary support to equip them for adult life.

### **Education, Employment and Training**

The number of young people and care experienced young people engaged in education, employment or training will be closely tracked. Efforts will be focused on reducing the proportion of those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), supporting their aspirations and long-term achievements.

## **Participation and Feedback**

Feedback from participation surveys, providers, and young people themselves will play a central role in shaping our services. Regular input will be gathered through reviews and participation forums, ensuring that the voices of young people inform practice and development.

## **Placement Instability**

Progress will be measured by the reduction in placement instability and the number of placement moves experienced by children and young people in our care, reflecting our commitment to providing them with security and permanence.

## **Partner Engagement**

Ongoing feedback from partners will support collaborative working and contribute to the continuous improvement of services across the local care system.

## **Reporting and Accountability**

Annual performance data will be reported to relevant committees and the Department for Education (DfE), ensuring transparency and accountability in the delivery of the Care Strategy.

## **RESIDENT BENEFIT**

This strategy will ensure that our children and young people in care receive consistent, high-quality support and care that promotes their wellbeing both physical and emotional), aspirations and long-term achievements as residents of Hillingdon.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

This strategy will be delivered within the existing financial envelope with targeted investment in priority areas such as placement sufficiency and participation. This strategy has been completed together with our finance partners.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The strategy reflects our duties under the Children act 1989, and associated statutory guidance.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

NIL.

## **APPENDICES**

Hillingdon's Care Strategy November 2025-2030