



Bristol City Council Corporate Parenting Report 2018



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CHILDREN IN CARE & CARE LEAVERS

BRISTOL CORPORATE

PARENTING STRATEGY

1. Introduction

In July 2018 Bristol launched a refreshed Corporate Parenting Strategy and Pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers. Informed by children and young people, it sets out an ambitious agenda for achieving our aspiration to be an excellent corporate parent and to engage the city in being the best extended family to children and young people in and leaving care.

Corporate Parenting Strategy Vision:

Bristol is committed to being an effective, caring, and ambitious corporate parent. Children and young people are at the heart of everything we do. We will do everything we can to make sure that children in our care and care leavers are set up for life.

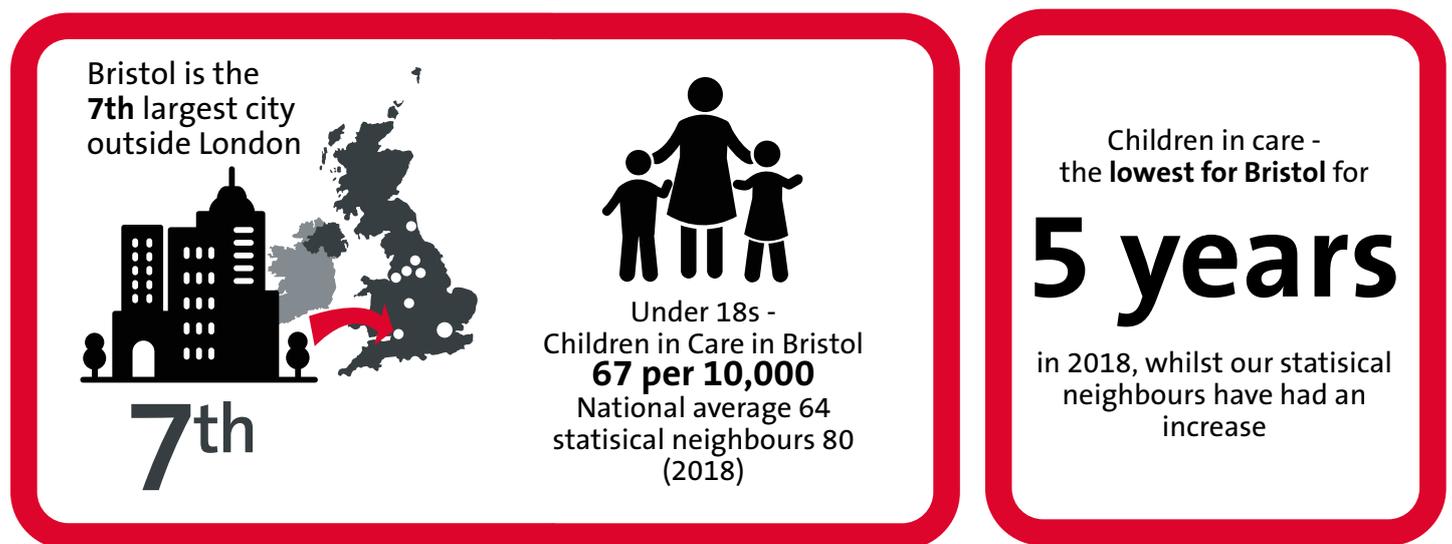
We will care about children in care and care leavers and not just for them and will ensure the same standard of care as any good parent. This means we have high aspirations for our children and will be strong advocates for them.

We will do everything we can to equip the children and young people in our care and care leavers with the skills needed to live a fulfilling, successful, and rewarding life.

The Strengthening Families programme has also been driving significant system-wide transformation of children's services in Bristol. The Programme was intended to make cost savings whilst holding our ambition of improving outcomes, commissioning and delivering quality services, and keeping children and families at the heart of what we do. The aims of the programme have been closely linked to our Corporate Parenting Strategy objectives.

The Corporate Parenting Strategy identified 7 priority areas of work required to deliver on our vision for children in care and care leavers. This report outlines progress being made against these and includes examples of steps being taken to ensure continued improvement.

2. Summary Data Profile: Children in Care and Care Leavers in Bristol¹



68% of children in care in Bristol are aged 10 or above, compared with 62% for England and statistical neighbours.

There has been an increase of 1% in the number of children in care aged 10 to 15 but there is a 3% reduction in children aged 16 and over.

Bristol's children in care aged 1 to 4 is 8% (same as the last two years) compared with 13% for both England and statistical neighbours. Bristol has similar figures to England and statistical neighbours relating to children aged under one and children aged 5 to 9 and these figures have remained static.

The ratio of male to female children in care is now 55% to 45% and similar to England and statistical neighbours. An even gender split was present for five consecutive years prior to this.

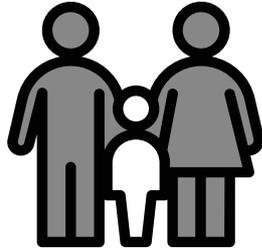
The legal status of children in care in Bristol is similar to the England average with 72% having a Care Order or Interim Care Order (compared to 58% in 2017). 21% of Bristol's children in care are accommodated by voluntary agreement under S20 of the Children Act 1989 (this is compared with 28% in 2017), the England average is 19%. 7% of children are in care with a Placement Order, the same as the England average.

In 2014, 10 unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) were cared for in Bristol making up 1% of the children in care population; in 2016 this had increased to 30, making up 4% of the children in care population. In 2018 Bristol had 43 UASC making up 7% of the children in care population, 1% higher than England and statistical neighbours.

¹ See also, Appendix 1

² All statistics are for March 2018 unless stated otherwise

A quarter of the children who ceased to be looked after returned home to live with parents or relatives, mostly as part of their care plan.



2%



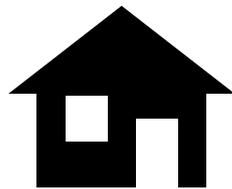
of children in care were subject to a caution or conviction during the 2018 (seven in total) reduced from 8% in 2017 - compared to 5% for England and statistical neighbours.

81% of children in care in Bristol live in a foster family compared to 74% nationally and 73% for statistical neighbours.



2% are placed with their parent compared to **6%** average for England and **5%** for statistical neighbours.

12% of children live in a children's home, residential school or semi-independent living, compared with **11%** nationally (a decrease from 2017).

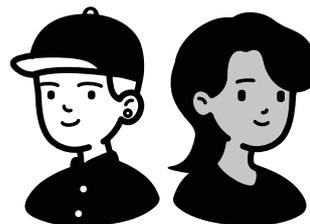


75% of Bristol's children in care live within 20 miles of their home address, similar to England and statistical neighbours.

Bristol is in touch with **98%** of care leavers aged 17 to 21. This is higher than statistical neighbours (**90%**) and the England average (**93%**).



55% of Bristol's 19 & 21 year olds are in education, employment or training, higher than statistical neighbours (**47%**) and England average (**51%**).



3. Overview of Progress Against Strategy Priorities:

Priority 1: Families receive the help they need when they need it - right response, right assessment, right help, right time.

In June 2016, the specialist long term services for children in care and care leavers remodelled into smaller 'through care' teams comprising of social workers, personal advisers, a support worker, administrator and practice lead. The new service is designed to support long term relationships with children and young people where all their support comes from the team to which they are allocated. This reduces handovers, better enables joint working and helps ensure that children and young people are in contact with people who they know and trust.

In 2018 the service grew from 7 teams to 8 and saw an increase from the original 21 social workers to 32 to support a reduction in caseloads and create space for more meaningful work with children. Similarly there has been an increase personal advisers and a reduction in their caseloads.

A new Exit from Care Team and the Edge of Care Services have also been embedded through the Strengthening Families Programme. This has been led by ensuring children who can be brought up in their own families have that opportunity. Both services have been successful and there is an evident reduction in the number of children in care.

Additionally we have had a commitment to ensuring that children who can live within their families are supported to do so, through reunification, appropriate court orders and kinship placements, and that early help options to prevent children entering the care system unnecessarily are used.

In September 2018 Bristol had ILACS Standard Inspection of children's social care services. Inspectors found:

When, after a prolonged period in care, the decision is made to reunite children with their birth families, the reunification process is carefully planned and well managed. Comprehensive parenting assessments help to ensure that such decisions are made safely and in the best interests of the child.



Contextual Safeguarding

Partners have made concerted efforts in 2018 /19 to strengthen our local response and prevention work in relation to contextual safeguarding and young people at risk of involvement in gangs and street conflict.

Bristol has been successful in securing a bid for Contextual Safeguarding Scale-Up with The University of Bedfordshire (<https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/scale-up/en>). This will provide helpful consultation and support over the next three years looking at approaches that Bristol can put into practice to safeguard children.

The term and thinking behind Contextual Safeguarding was developed by the University of Bedfordshire. Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding and responding to young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships.

Therefore children's social care practitioners need to engage with individuals and sectors who do have influence over/within extra-familial contexts, and recognise that assessment of, and intervention with, these spaces are a critical part of safeguarding practices. Contextual Safeguarding, therefore, expands the objectives of child protection systems in recognition that young people are vulnerable to abuse in a range of social contexts.

Bristol's Contextual Safeguarding Panel

The panel was created June 2018 and sits, on average, three monthly. The panel is designed to have oversight of the children open to Children's Services, including children in care, where there are concerns about the child being involved or at risk of:

- Going missing/absent from home or care
- Gangs or street conflict
- Sexual exploitation.
- Criminal exploitation
- Significant involvement in offending

The focus of the panel is to ensure that there is a consistent and clear process for managing risk through a shared multiagency planning for the child where there are worries. The primary aim of the panel is to share information and intelligence, ensure joined up working between the different areas of risk and to reflect and contribute to the child's existing plan. This panel does not replace risk management meetings but is a forum for discussing complex situations often where there is more than one child involved. This is achieved by:

- Having oversight of the risk management plan for a child referred to the panel.
- Holding oversight of networks and connections between children, young people and adults.
- Where there are links between children, they are discussed as a group at panel.

Bristol City Council and Avon and Somerset Police also hold monthly Gang Strategy meetings to discuss gang members and children at risk of being groomed into a gang. Bristol City Council also works with Barnardo's Against Sexual Exploitation (BASE) and attends fortnightly Topaz (police) intelligence meetings. Topaz Child Exploitation Team actively investigates allegations of CSE and CCE and supports the children and young people affected (Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Criminal Exploitation). In the past year, much has been done to better understand the prevalence of CSE across agencies and, through use of improved screening and predictive analysis, to better identify those most at risk.

Children in Care and the Youth Justice System

The Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 established that children remanded in custody should become looked after children. They previously would not necessarily have entered the care system.

A refreshed project group has been developing an action plan to reduce unnecessary criminalisation of children in care, using diversion and restorative approaches. It includes plans to map existing resources and identify gaps, roll out training in restorative approaches, developing a city-wide strategy including a new procedure for police call outs to children's homes and foster homes and establishing a review process for children in care who offend or regularly go missing, for example. This work has been informed by the [National Protocol on reducing unnecessary criminalisation of looked-after children and care leavers](#) and will help to create a consistent approach for children placed within Bristol and beyond.

There has been a significant reduction in cautions/convictions for children who have been in care for 12 months or more during 2018, dropping to 3.1% from 8% in 2017. This reflects the renewed multiagency approach to reducing criminalisation. This reduction in convictions is reflected in the numbers of children in care who received a custodial sentence: of the 16 children and young people who received a custodial sentence in 2018, 19% were children who had been looked after for 12 months or more, compared with 33% in 2017. Bristol's Youth Offending Team and the local partnership and governance arrangements were inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation in July 2018.

An overall rating of 'Requires improvement' was given. The inspection highlighted a committed and skilled workforce across the Youth Offending Team, who are working hard to delivering a high-quality service to support the desistance of children and young people from offending, address their safety and wellbeing needs, and protect others.

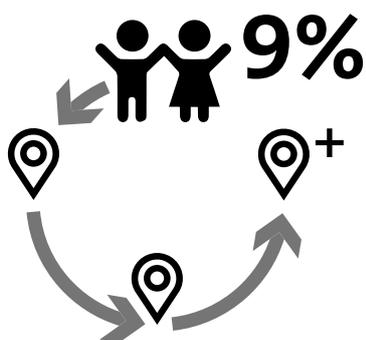
Reducing offending and the criminalisation of children in care remains a priority lead by our Reducing Offending of Children in care Practitioner. A multi-agency task and finish has been developing the Bristol local Protocol for Reducing Offending of Children in Care and Care leavers and this will be launched in 2019.

Priority 2: Children are supported to live safely within their families or with people who know them best. When this is not possible, children move to a permanent family or care placement without delay.

One of the most important factors in keeping children safe is the quality and stability of the relationships they hold with others; whether that's with a carer, social worker, personal adviser or with another trusted adult, relationships that last, and offer stability, matter. All children need a permanent family arrangement wherever possible, provided in a timely way. When children enter care we are focussed on determining the right plan for either their return home or their exit from care to a permanent family arrangement.

Having the same carers and a stable place to live throughout a child's time in care and until they are ready to leave are important indicators of future success. Three key performance measures help us to monitor how well we are doing in this regard:

1. The number of moves a child experiences¹: this year 9% of children had three or more placements, this is lower than the national and statistical neighbour figures.



2. The length of placement²: 74% of children in long term care lived with the same carers for at least two years, although this is a reduction on last year it remains above the comparators' averages.



3. The percentage of young people who are supported to continue to live with their foster carers beyond the age of 18 in Staying Put arrangements: there has been a reduction in the number of care leavers aged 19 and 20 continuing 'staying put' with their foster carers from 40% to 31%. This is less than its statistical neighbours (39%) but more than the England average (26%)



The number, range and quality of placements are important factors in enabling us to find the right placement at the right time and in the right area for a child. Bristol City Council commissions foster care, residential care and post-16 supported accommodation placements from a mixed market of internal and external providers. Such placements are costly and it is important that Bristol manages the market to ensure that placements are cost effective and of the highest quality. Effective commissioning will improve placement choice, reduce placement breakdown, support integration between children in care services, universal and specialist services and may reduce numbers of children coming into care whilst delivering value for money.

¹ NI62 PAF A1 measure: percentage of children who have experienced two or more moves in the previous twelve month period

² NI63 PAFD78 measure: The percentage of children looked after aged under 16 at year end who had been looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years who were living in the same placement for at least 2 years, or are placed for adoption and their adoptive placement together with their previous placement together last for at least 2 years.

The Sufficiency Duty, under Section 22G of The Children Act, requires the council to take steps to ensure, as far as practicable, we can provide children in care with homes that meet their needs, within the area. This involves making sure there is a sufficient range and number of providers capable of meeting the differing needs of our children in care. Bristol's Sufficiency Strategy for Placements for Children in Care and Care Leavers is currently being refreshed for 2019-2022 and is expected to be published later this year.

The Sufficiency Strategy will set out the needs of our children in care and care leavers and consider what is required by Bristol in order to deliver sufficient provision to provide the right placement, at the right time, in the right place. Data is being collected and analysed to help understand the local dynamics which affect sufficiency; and the ten most expensive placements have also been reviewed to provide further intelligence about local needs and requirements.

The regionalisation of adoption ³ – Adoption West

In line with Government policy, Bristol is one of six local authorities working together with voluntary aided adoption agencies to form a single adoption agency for the northern region of the South West that will be called 'Adoption West'. The five other local authorities are: South Gloucestershire, Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset, Gloucester and Wiltshire and the voluntary adoption organisations and support agencies are CCS, Action for Children, Barnardo's, After Adoption, PAC and Adoption UK.

Adoption West is the first Adoption Service in the country to be established as a public company guaranteed by six local authorities. The work to establish the legal basis of the organisation, as

a corporate entity and an operational adoption service, which has a commissioning arrangement with all the authorities, has proven to be complex. However, the service now has a full Director's Board appointed and a permanent Service Director in post to lead the regional agency.

Independent Reviewing Service

Having a clear and accessible care plan or pathway plan, influenced by the child or young person's wishes and feelings is crucial to ensuring that individual needs are met and that leaving care happens at a time that's right for them.

All children in care have an allocated Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) whose primary focus is to quality assure the care planning and review process for the child and to ensure that their wishes and feelings are given full consideration. The role is an important one as it should enable the local authority to achieve improved outcomes for children. An annual report is written by the IRO manager and presented at Corporate Parenting Panel.

The recent ILACS Inspection found:

'Children are actively encouraged to, and do, attend their reviews. Advocacy is used appropriately. The quality of reviews is good. Minutes are written directly to the child, giving the feeling of a personalised letter. These minutes acknowledge the child's wishes and explain in child-friendly language the outcomes and decisions of their review. The workloads of independent reviewing officers (IROs) are now manageable and the level of oversight of practice and challenge they provide has improved significantly since the last inspection.'

³ Regionalising Adoption. DfE. June 2015.
Adoption: A vision for change. DfE. March 2016.

Over 96% of children take part in their review in Bristol, contributing in a variety of ways, sometimes chairing their meeting with support from their IRO.

This year's annual report highlighted the following strengths:

- Increased oversight and monitoring between reviews.
- Information being provided to young people about their IRO before their first review.
- Regular feedback being sought from children, parents and carers.
- IRO manager meeting regularly with Head of Service and Service Manager for Through Care to maintain and develop positive working relationships.
- Children's participation in their reviews improved and by the end of the reporting period was above target at just over 96%.
- Evidence of challenge has improved as evidenced on young people's individual LCS record.
- There was also evidence of successful group challenge around life story work and unallocated cases.

The service also identified the following priorities for future work:

- Improve timeliness of reviews
- Ensuring every child has an up to date Care Plan before their review, written by social care and shared with the child.
- Ensure child has permanency plan by the second review.
- Promote high quality plans which include and are informed by the child's wishes and feelings and are based on an up to date assessment of their needs.
- Help ensure entitlements of Children in Care pledge are met and understood.
- Develop systems so the continuous learning from feedback for children is embedded in the IRO service.
- Ensure that life story work continues to develop and be offered to all children in care.
- Work with foster carers to create information for foster carers about the role of the IRO, the child's review and how they can support and prepare the child for their review.
- Jointly review the consultation forms

Priority 3: Children and young people tell us what's important to them and this influences what we do and the way we design and develop our services.

Listening and responding to the voice of children and young people is central to our Pledge and Corporate Parenting Strategy. Children and young people influence all aspects of their care plan and are supported to play a full and positive role in their community, the city and nationally.

Over the past year, the voice of children and young people in service development and delivery has been strengthened in the following ways:

- The Children in Care Council (CiCC) meet regularly and have worked on a number of priority areas which they have presented to Councillors and senior managers at Corporate Parenting Panel. This year, the CiCC completed art and a film projects to improve understanding and challenge stereotypes around body image and self-esteem. A launch event was held at City Hall, which the Mayor and other senior managers and Councillors attended. The children presented and discussed their work and the art is currently displayed in the foyer of City Hall.
- A CiCC representative and Care Leavers' representative sit on Corporate Parenting Panel and have a standing agenda item allowing them dedicated space to raise and discuss their work and priorities. They hold their own meetings monthly and work on a chosen topic each year as well as producing the RVoice magazine. They engage with consultation activity and work on stakeholder projects.

Examples of work undertaken by the Children in Care Council (CiCC) include:

- Working with the NHS and Barnardo's to pilot a mental health project allocating personal health care budgets to children in care and care leavers to improve their mental health.
- Working with The University of the West of England on a project to help student social workers engage and gain feedback from children in care.
- Delivering training to volunteers interested in becoming Independent Visitors.
- Working with the placements team to help train people interested in becoming foster carers.
- Attending Full Council in 2018 to re-launch the updated Pledge and the Councils Corporate Parenting Strategy. They spoke in front of both Mayors and all the elected councillors.
- Helping to organise the Children in Care Talent Contest.
- Meeting with Independent Reviewing Officers and team managers through the year and have been consulted on a range of issues, including improving children in care reviews.
- Taking part in two twilight Corporate Parenting Panel Meetings; one to work on Improving Outcomes for Care Leavers and the other on Improving Placements.
- Enabling some of the newest CiCC members to meet with senior managers and the chair of Corporate Parenting Panel as an icebreaking event and to help the children choose their new work project topic for 2019.
- Working with Care Leavers United Bristol on a project to improve information for young people who are preparing to leave care.

Care Leavers United Bristol (CLUB) is a participation group for care leavers convened by Barnardos, which continues to be a success. The group have run a number of fun activities, offering different opportunities to different groups of young people. Barnardo's employs two care leavers within their service. Barnardo's works closely with the Through Care Service so that together care leavers can be fully aware of the support, opportunities and activities available and are supported to access these.

A focus this year has been on isolation and loneliness that care leavers highlighted as a worry for them. Following a bid Barnardo's CLUB have secured a DfE grant towards tackling isolation and loneliness with care leavers in Bristol.

Personal health care budgets 'you're in control, I'm in control' have helped a number of young people throughout the year. Young people have been able to express how their personal budget impacted their emotional health and the Corporate Parenting Panel saw a film made with some of these young people. The offer has been secured for another year with a hope that it will be ongoing.

Bristol City Council has two Care Leaver Ambassadors employed as apprentices in the 'family firm' to support work with their care leaver peers.

Priority 4: Being in care is an enriching experience that equips children for a successful life.

The work around equal access to 'learn, play and grow' for children in care has made a strong start in 2018 with some providers in the city offering free swimming and leisure activities and other offering free and discounted events for foster carers. In 2009 we will establish the Epic Card and the Epic Fund for additional support to help our children and young people make the most of the City and the rich experiences on offer

We celebrated our children's achievements at the EPIC awards ceremony attended by their peers, carers and included a special award from the Mayor. Children received awards across a range of different aspects of their lives including Education, Sports, Arts, Helping others and being a good brother or sister.

The Corporate Parenting Strategy included a commitment to bring forward proposals to alleviate the burden of council tax for care leavers. A Council Tax Discretionary Relief Policy was put in place by Bristol City Council, with effect from 1st April 2018. This grants up to 100% discretionary relief from council tax to support our care leavers from the age of 18 until their 25th birthday. This provides practical help and financial assistance to care leavers whilst they are developing their independence.

The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has worked closely with the Through Care Service to develop a protocol around Universal Credit which details arrangements to jointly support our young people who the perhaps don't have support around them to navigate the claims process and manage their finances.

Bristol's Local Offer to care leavers which includes the new duty to 25, has been published. This was developed with Care Leavers and a wide range of partners. It details care leaver's entitlements and the support and opportunities available to them. We continue to develop this offer with our children in care and care leavers.

The Through Care Service and Care Leavers United Bristol (CLUB) have delivered an annual programme of engagement events and activities including the talent show 'Our Kids Got Talent' event at the Colston Hall, summer and Christmas parties and a number of events in care leavers' week. In 2018 the care leavers' awards became the STARS awards (Strong Talented Awesome Rollercoaster Survivors) and was a glittering ceremony that celebrated the successes of our young people across a range of categories.

The Isolation and Loneliness campaign of the previous year has continued to be at the forefront and a second Butlins holiday was enjoyed by a group of young people who have just left care or were particularly vulnerable or without a network around them. It was the first holiday where young people formed lasting friendships and wanted to meet regularly for some food together. The Supper Club was organised for the first Tuesday of each month and grew in popularity over 2018 as a place where young people could meet, talk, get support if they needed it and have a meal together. The numbers grew from an initial 8 young people to 40 at the end of the year.



Priority 5: Deliver good quality care placements and move on accommodation for care leavers.

The recent ILACS inspection found that

'Assessments of prospective foster carers are thorough and comprehensive, and give a clear recommendation to the fostering panel. The fostering panel is effective and makes timely and appropriate recommendations.'

The inspection also found that

'Children seen during the inspection were living in appropriate placements that met their needs with evidence of improved outcomes. However, despite clear action planning to recruit foster carers to meet the specific needs of children in care and an on-going marketing programme, the local authority does not have enough foster carers to meet children's needs. Due to a lack of suitable placement choice, careful matching is not always possible when children first become looked after or when changing placements. As a result, some children live in bridging placements while a suitable match is sought.'

In order to offer children stability and the opportunity to maintain relationships with family and friends we need to be able to place the majority of children in well – matched foster families within twenty miles of their home postcode. Our strategy set out our ambition to proactively recruit foster carers who can accommodate specific children such as brothers and sisters and children with disabilities and older children.

The percentage of Bristol children in care in foster placements (including relative and friend placements) has remained around 81%. This is higher than the 2017/18 figures for England and statistical neighbours 73% and 74%.

Bristol has seen a reduction in the number of carers in its 'in house' provision from 240 to 229 (registered to care for 394 children). This is coupled by an aging foster carer population, a quarter of foster carers are aged 60 and above. There has been a reduction in Staying Put arrangements overall. The 'in house' provision has seen a reduction from 42 to 30 through 2017 and 2018. Not all of these places would be available for young children however, as 22 of the remaining Staying Put Arrangements are with foster carers coming to the end of their fostering career.

There has been a number of recruitment campaigns which have not seen the success of previous years. Appreciation of existing dedicated carers was celebrated with a summer ceilidh, an awards ceremony and a party to recognise birth children in foster families. Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel have supported all the activity and have helped value and promote fostering. The Panel's priorities for 2019 include a commitment to continue to support and raise awareness of the need for carers.



Bristol is ambitious, setting targets aimed at growing the foster carer population. Recruitment of foster carers this year has targeted carers for those children where demand is greatest. By building capacity the aim is to offer greater choice and therefore the best opportunity to match carers to children. Planned activity includes:

- An advert on Bristol TV covering six themes of fostering activities.
- Continued work with black and ethnic groups and faith communities in Bristol to encourage people to consider fostering. Direct work with community and faith leaders, production of specific leaflets for black and ethnic communities and meeting with the Somali Women's group.
- Continued work with all community groups in an endeavour to reach a broad demographic particularly as we try to build capacity for children in the city and those seeking refuge upon arrival, this includes supported lodgings and mentoring.

The fostering service focus for 2019 includes:

- A robust training offer for all foster carers with a bespoke offer for new carers
- Review of the support and supervision offer including more support groups and out of hours support
- Review of the financial offer to foster carers.
- Continued recruitment activity including partnership work with Homes for Good
- Continued support for Treatment Foster Care Oregon, which is demonstrating very positive outcomes for young people and foster carers are reporting that the programme has avoided placement breakdown.

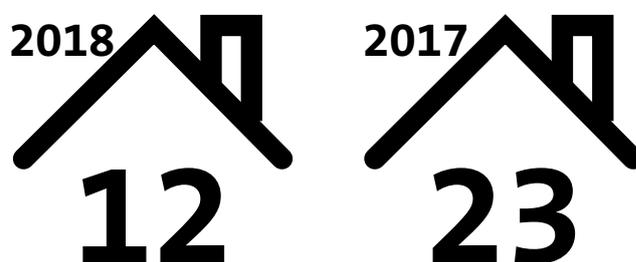
With 78% of children in care are aged ten and over it is important to focus on the positives of looking after older children and securing permanency.

Children's homes and residential special school placements

At March 2018:



74 children and young people lived in a children's home or residential special school.



12 children were living in Bristol's children's homes compared to 23 in 2017.



62 children were placed in independent children's homes or residential special schools, often at distance.

With 78% of children in care are aged ten and over it is important to focus on the positives of looking after older children and securing permanency.

There has been an increase over the past two years in the number of children living in independent children's home and residential special schools; an increase also in the number of younger children. Such provision is generally specialist and often includes integrated education and therapy. Bristol's growing use reflects the growing complexity of the child in care population.

The re-profiling project of our own children's homes aims to keep children that need this type of resource closer to Bristol and is part of an improvement plan that builds upon a service that is now rated as GOOD by Ofsted. This will see smaller children's homes developed that will feel more like a small family rather than a big institution and will enable us to care for our most complex young people who are unable to live in a large group environment.

Short breaks for disabled children

In addition to full-time placements, Bristol also provides a range of short breaks for disabled children including short break fostering and residential care. From April to October 2018 Bristol had:

- 28 foster carers specifically approved as short break carers for disabled children.
- 32 children and young people received a regular fostering short break.
- 109 overnight sessions were delivered.
- 5 assessments were underway of people specifically for short breaks fostering

- 53 children and young people accessed a regular short break at one of Bristol's two residential short break homes

Adoption and achieving permanence

All children should grow up in a permanent, safe and loving home. Where this cannot be provided by a child's parents or wider family and friends (often through a Special Guardianship Order), adoption may be considered as a possible route to permanency.

Bristol's Adoption Service recruits, assesses and approves adopters with the aim of ensuring that every child who needs an adoptive family is found one. The adoption service provides on-going support for children and their adoptive families, including through applications made to the Adoption Support Fund. Support is available to children who have experienced a difficult early life and their adoptive family until the child is aged 21 (or 25 with an EHCP).

In addition to this, Bristol provides independent support to birth families and supports contact between birth families and adoptive families through provision of Letterbox⁴ and supervision of direct contact arrangements where this has been agreed.

Adopters and prospective adopters have spoken positively about their experiences of assessment and training in Bristol this year, and those being matched with children have reported that meetings with the adoption medical advisor were helpful, particularly where the adopted child had identified health needs.

⁴ Letterbox is a scheme that enables birth relatives and adoptive parents to stay in contact by exchanging letters and photographs.

Feedback from the Chair of Bristol's Adoption Panel has also been positive, commenting:

'The cases presented to the Panel by Bristol social workers have overall shown a high quality of assessment of adopters and evidence of thoughtful and timely intervention by Children's Services in order to protect children'.

The adoption services was praised in the recent ILACS Inspection of children's social care services. They found:

'When adoption is the plan for children, they receive an effective and timely service. Social workers carefully consider the individual needs of brothers and sisters. Children's permanence reports are thorough. Contact arrangements are thoughtful and well managed. Family-finding and matching are effective for these children who achieve permanence without delay. Foster-to-adopt is always considered in order to promote early attachments and avoid delay in children achieving permanence. Post-adoption support, including for special guardians, is effective in supporting children and their carers'.

The adoption activity from 01/04/17 to 31/3/18 is as follows:

- 32 children were approved for adoption
- 27 children were placed with adoptive families.
- 21 adoption orders were granted
- 19 adoptive families were approved as adopters
- The average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family was 455 days compared to a national average of 520

days, this placed Bristol in the top quarter out of 152 local authorities across the country in terms of timeliness.

- The average time between court authority to place a child with adopters and a match with an adoptive family being made was 184 days in Bristol compared to a national average of 220 days, placing Bristol in the top third of local authorities for this in terms of timeliness.
- Bristol placed 58% of children with their adoptive family within 14 months of the child entering care, compared to a national average of 53%.

Accommodation and support for care leavers

The Recent ILACS Inspection of children's social care services found:

Services for care leavers have improved significantly since the last inspection, when the service was judged to be inadequate. Most care leavers experience continuity of support and have personal advisers who know them well. Professionals work together effectively to keep care leavers safe and reduce risk.

Contact with care leavers increased significantly in Bristol last year and remains higher, at 98% than the national and statistical neighbours. 100% of care leavers have a pathway plan which is consistent and embedded practice. The quality of plans needs to improve; Ofsted found them to be too variable. Continuing to strive for high quality plans will be a focus for improvement work.

The 'Staying Close' DfE funded innovation project for care leavers leaving children's homes completed the first year of its two year programme. The Project is supporting 15 young people up to ten hours a week from the same staff member who worked with them when they lived in the children's home. A pod house has been installed into one of the children's home's garden; this allows a young person to 'stay close', receiving support from the residential team and getting a sense of living more independently.

An agreement has been reached with a housing association in Bristol, seeing them making direct offers to care leavers when they are ready, and with staying close support in place. Work is underway to create a protocol to offer young people a council house within 15 minutes' walk of the children's homes they are moving on from, as a direct offer. The project is now in phase two working with six local authorities to develop agreements for young people who have moved to a different authority that they are from. This work will lead to developing a South West Care Leaver Offer.

In Bristol there has been a concerted multiagency approach to preventing and reducing homelessness and addressing the need for emergency accommodation. The 'MAPS' service was put in place in November 2017 to work with all young people including care leavers at risk of homelessness and in need of emergency accommodation. Additionally protocols have been agreed to make clear the processes in place in relation to 'Eviction and the Approach for Young People Leaving Custody without Accommodation' that has been agreed by the multi-agency group.

Services for Care Leavers who were Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) will be enhanced by the UASC improvement grant that will seek to fund improvement in training, placement and housing options and service co-ordination across the sector. In addition we will be working in partnership with Refugee Rights on the Paul Hamlyn Funded Project; a two year grant with the aim of providing specific support to young people subject to immigration control in Bristol, who are either in care or leaving care, up to the age of 25.

This will include:

- One to one mentoring for young people
- Specialist immigration advice for young people
- Working with the local authority to develop improved practice on working with young people subject to immigration control
- Running the Young People's Forum
- Supporting young people to advocate for change
- Trauma session

The Recent Ofsted ILACS inspection found that

'unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are well supported, based on a clear assessment of their needs, and are placed in suitable accommodation without delay.'



Priority 6: Hold high aspirations and close the attainment gap for children in care and increase the percentage of care leavers in education, training and employment.

We hold high aspirations for our children in care and care leavers and are committed to closing the attainment gap and increasing the percentage of care leavers in education, training and employment.

All children in care are students of the HOPE Virtual School which has both a head teacher and governing body. There are close links between the Virtual School Governing body and the Corporate Parenting Panel. Focus is on attendance, attainment and reducing exclusions, the HOPE promotes and supports the delivery of a quality education for all children in care for whom Bristol is the responsible authority and for those children placed and educated in Bristol by another local authority.

Early indications are that results from 2017-8 will show:

- good results have been achieved at KS1, outperforming children in care nationally.
- KS2 outcomes are lower than the previous year but progress is above national and regional for reading, writing and maths. 52% of the cohort had special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), of which 30% had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)
- performance at KS4 continues to be below national standards for children in care. This cohort also had a high number of students with SEND.

HOPE Virtual School achievements 2017-18

- Three year improving trend at KS1.
- Improvements in the quality of Personal Education Planning (PEP) from Early Years Foundation stage (EYFS) to Post 16 and complex SEN with 96% of PEPs now assessed as good or better.
- 44 care leavers were in higher education.
- A significant reduction in the delay between UASC coming into care and their start in appropriate education. For pupils placed within Bristol and Counties that Used to be Avon (CUBA) this has been achieved in or close to 20 days for all new arrivals this academic year. For those placed further afield this has, on occasion, taken longer.
- Fewer pupils reached the persistent absence threshold and fewer were excluded in 2017-18 in comparison to the previous year.
- The number of pupils receiving part time education and those not on roll has continued to decline.
- A compilation of poems from several years of entries to the Mary Palmer Poetry Prize Competition was produced.
- A task group of designated teachers (DTs) worked with The HOPE to produce a set of materials to support other DTs.
- Approximately 1500 people, including carers, social workers, named governors and designated teachers have received training.

The recent ILACS Inspection found that ‘the quality of personal education plans (PEPs) has improved significantly since the last inspection. At their best, the PEPs are of very high quality, reflecting the concerted effort made by the virtual head to drive up standards. The virtual school head manages the use of pupil premium well through the PEPs. Funding is only released once effective provision, targeted clearly at improving the outcomes, is identified by the school.

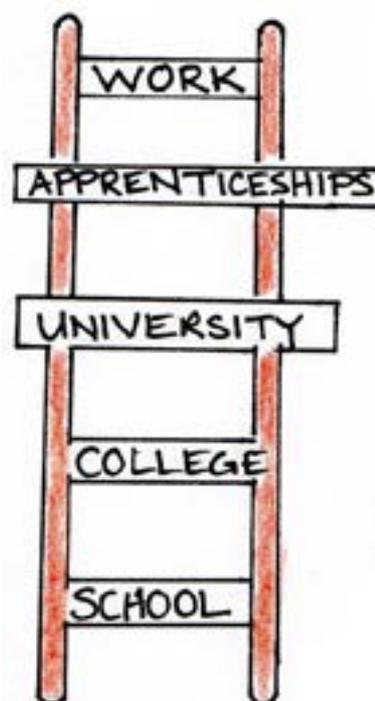
Priority for 2019 will be a continued focus on closing the attainment gap, improving attendance and reducing exclusions. An Improvement plan is in place following the ILACS inspection. This includes the work of the HOPE but requires close partnership working across the system. Delivery of this plan is overseen by the Corporate Parenting Panel.

The Recent Ofsted ILACS inspection found that

‘while the percentage of care leavers in education, employment and training is higher than averages for care leavers nationally at 56%, it does not yet meet the local authority’s aspirations for its young people. There is insufficient take-up by care leavers of the opportunities offered. Therefore, their ability to reach their potential is limited’.

To enhance our offer to young people, a DfE funded innovation project for care leavers was established in 2018 that aims to improve the participation of young people in education, employment and training through the use of a Social Impact Bond. A new team called Reboot West was appointed will provide extra support to young people who may be a long way from obtaining employment or training, or may benefit from support to reach their employment potential. This is an exciting four year project with three other neighbouring local authorities that will begin to impact on our performance in 2019. One of the innovative elements of this project is through the use of Acceptance and Commitment and Therapy that helps young people take more control over their thoughts and feelings in a positive way.

There was an increase in proportion of care leavers in higher education (8% compared to 5% in 2016/17 and 4% in 2015/16). This improving trajectory is a result of the continued focus of practitioners working with care leavers and is assisted by the Higher Education offer.



Priority 7: Improve health and well-being by ensuring high quality health services and information are provided to children, young people and carers.

Bristol's health services specifically for children in care include Children Looked After Nurses (CLAN) and Designated Doctor. All children entering care have an initial in-depth health assessment within the first 28 days, with a follow up assessment every six months for those under five years of age and annually for those over five.

Bristol's recorded figures for the percentage of health assessment reviews undertaken on time during the 2017/2018 has risen by 4% to 85%, however this remains lower than the national and statistical neighbour figures; dentist have remained the same at 84% which is in line with the national and statistical neighbour average. Improving both of these figures continues to be a priority and is overseen by the Transformation Board. Children in care and care leavers immunisations are at 95%; considerably higher than both national and statistical neighbours.

Thinking Allowed is a dedicated child and adolescent mental health service in place for children in care. This team can also refer on to the full range of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in the city. An annual health report is presented to Corporate Parenting Panel outlining the work of these services in meeting the health needs of children in care.

A strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) is used to assess children's emotional and behavioural health. The SDQ is a short behavioural screening questionnaire that cover details of emotional difficulties; conduct difficulties; hyperactivity or inattention; friendships and peer groups; positive behaviour; and impact. The SDQ is an internationally validated method of assessing children and young people's risk of experiencing emotional and mental health difficulties; it is completed by the child's carer on an annual basis and is scored on a scale from 0-40. Any score above 17 alerts the child's social worker to consider a referral to Thinking Allowed. In 2017/18, 83% of children had an SDQ completed and returned by their carer. The number of SDQs submitted has increased over the past two years and are consistently higher than the figures for both national and statistical neighbours.

Over the past two years the Through Care Service has been involved in the C-CATS study carried out by Bath University. The study has considered the trauma-related psychological profiles of young people in care and included:

- Development of mental health difficulties for children in care
- Relevance of traumatic stress
- Identifying and addressing traumatic stress
- The views of young people and carers around support needs

The study found that 53% of children were experiencing chronic distress; 32% borderline distress and 15% were resilient. PTSD can impact on all areas of a child's life and has complex features that can include:

- Affect dysregulation - 'When I am upset it takes me a long time to calm down'
- Negative self-concept - 'I don't matter'
- Interpersonal disturbances – 'I find it difficult to have good friends'

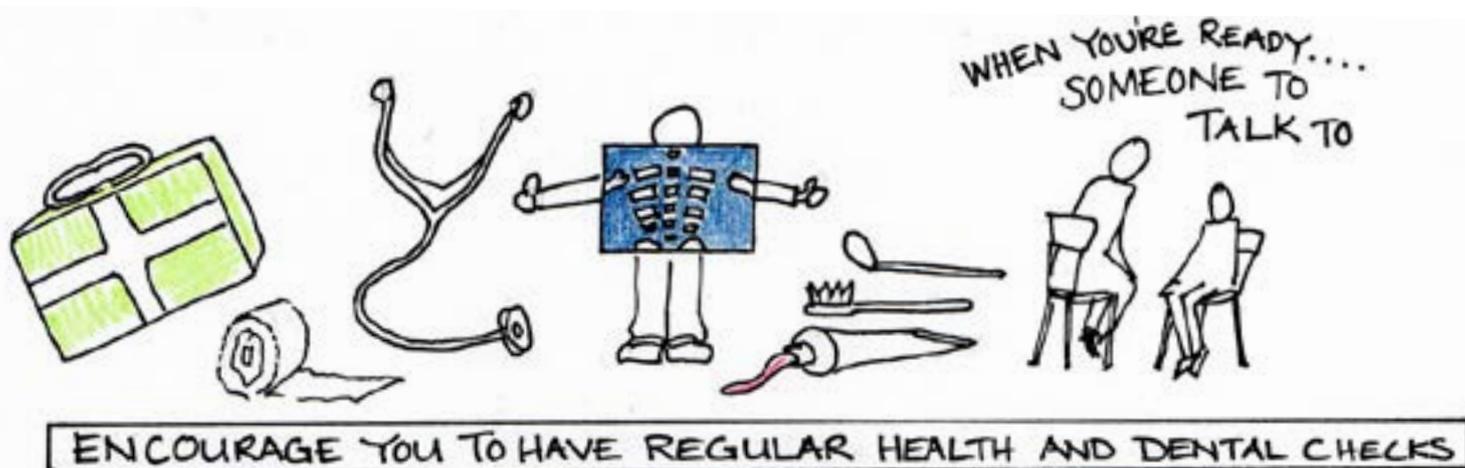
As a result of the study two interventions are being trialled with children in care:

- Trauma-focussed cognitive behavioural therapy
- Supporting children to process their memories, address potentially 'unhelpful' meanings, and develop more adaptive coping skills

Children's emotional and mental health remain a priority with a focus on training for social workers, personal advisers and foster carers to better meet the needs of our children. This has included ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) training for a number of personal advisers working with our care leavers.

The recent ILACS Inspection of children's social care services found:

'Through the 'Thinking Allowed' and the 'Treatment Foster Care Oregon' projects, the CAMHS team for children looked after provides good access to primary healthcare and good therapeutic services to support children's emotional health and well-being. These initiatives provide timely, high-quality interventions that support children in their placements effectively.'



4. Governance

The Corporate Parenting Panel operates as a panel of Full Council to ensure that the Council effectively discharges its role as corporate parent of children in care and care leavers. The Corporate Parenting Panel was established in 2007. It meets five times each year and is an effective cross party working group of elected members, senior officers, partner agencies and children in care, care leavers and foster carer representatives. The Panel undertakes its work by championing children in care and care leavers across the council and evaluating how well the corporate parenting responsibility is discharged. It will hold all parts of the City Council to account for the delivery of improved outcomes in every area of a child or young person's life by:

- Overseeing the implementation of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the development of integrated services for children in care and care leavers
- Progressing the implementation of national and local policy for children in care and care leavers, including maintaining a focus on prevention and services supporting children in their birth families and particularly those children on the edge of care.
- Scrutinising performance reports on the City Council and partners' key performance indicators for children in care and care leavers, taking action where necessary to drive improvement.

- Producing the Annual Corporate Parenting Report to Full Council, including an analysis of city council and partner's performance in respect of corporate parenting and developing an action plan for the following year.
- Taking lead responsibility for ensuring effective participation arrangements for children in care and care leavers in City Council and partnership work.
- Considering regular reports on the way in which the Local Authority discharges its parental responsibility in practice through residential, family placement, adoption and case holding services provided or procured by the Local Authority.
- Taking an active role in ensuring effective quality assurance arrangements are in place for children in care and care leaver services, including a robust representation, compliments, complaints and independent reviewing arrangements.
- Identifying specific areas for exploration in order to engage in areas of specific interest and improvement.

The Corporate parenting Panel works closely with other strategic partnerships in the city to deliver good outcomes for children in care and care leavers. Local partnership arrangements for safeguarding and community safety have been undergoing transformation work in the past year. Soon, work previously covered by both Safeguarding Boards (Children's and Adult's), our Community Safety Partnership (Safer Bristol)

and the Children and Families Partnership Board will be encompassed delivered by the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership (KBSP) Board. The Police, Clinical Commissioning Group and Bristol City Council have statutory duties to deliver and are joint and equal partners in these arrangements. In addition to the three partners the KBSP has representation from a number of other key organisations including from education and voluntary sectors. The Local Arrangements for Bristol will be published in June 2019.

The responsibilities of the new Partnership Board are set out in the Care Act 2014; Children Act 2004, Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and associated guidance. The Board will have an Independent Chair to co-ordinate the decision making and ensure that the partners are following due process when making decision. It is also proposed that the Board will task planning groups that undertake specific and focussed work and will work with our neighbouring local authority areas to make improvements and share learning across the region.

Corporate Parenting Panel Priorities 2019

In addition to the priorities set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy, the Corporate

Parenting Panel will pursue the priority activity outlined below:

Corporate Parenting Strategic Priority	Within 12 months Corporate Parenting Panel will have	Outcome
Children are supported to live safely within their families or with people who know them best. When this is not possible, children move to a permanent family or care placement without delay.	Initiated a project to support children in our care and care leavers to build life-long links with family and friends	Tackle isolation and loneliness and support emotional health and well-being (our young people have asked us to make this our top priority) Our goal is to enable young people to live successful, happy home and family lives.
Children and young people tell us what's important to them and this influences what we do and the way we design and develop our services.	Built on the success of Corporate Parenting twilight sessions with young people we will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● take steps to widen participation ● ensure children and young people set the agenda and are supported to hold us to account 	Young people's voices shape our services, get to know us and build trusted, confident relationships with their corporate parents
Being in care is an enriching experience that equips children for a successful life.	Corporate Parenting Panel will track and champion all our year 10-11s, ensuring they each have opportunities for work experience, mentoring and access to high quality education, training and apprenticeships.	All our young people are enabled to achieve their potential.

Being in care is an enriching experience that equips children for a successful life.	Delivered a shared event between corporate parenting panel and the HOPE Governors to set out how we will achieve our shared goals and aspirations for young people and demolishes reference to 'minimum standards'	Young people are supported to succeed and reach their full academic potential.
Deliver good quality care placements and move on accommodation for care leavers locally.	Promoted fostering in our communities and through the media. Our foster carers will know they are the city's VIPs.	Bristol is the fostering agency of choice locally. Our children have a choice of excellent fostering families that reflects the diversity and vibrancy of the city in which we live.

Appendix 1: Corporate Parenting Panel Membership

All Bristol City Councillors and the elected Mayor are corporate parents and as such are invited to attend the Corporate Parenting Panel. The Panel is chaired by the lead member for People: Cllr Helen Goodwin.

The core membership of the panel in 2017-2018 has included the following:

Councillor Helen Godwin (chair)
Councillor Eleanor Combley
Councillor Clive Stevens
Councillor Harriet Clough
Councillor Claire Hiscott
Councillor Steve Jones
Councillor Gill Kirk
Councillor Anna Keen
Councillor Ruth Pickersgill
Councillor Celia Phipps
Councillor Brenda Massey
Alderman Brian Price
Alderman Jackie Norman

Officers of Bristol City Council:

Ann James: *Director, Children and Family Services, People Directorate*

Jacqui Jenson: *Executive Director, People Directorate*

James Beardall: *Head of Service, Permanency and Specialist Services*

Maria Finlayson: *Service Manager, Children's Placements*

Racheal Pryor: *Head of the Virtual School*

Partners:

David Berridge: *Advisor to members*

Julie Henderson: *Designated Nurse for Children in Care*

Suzanne Davies: *Participation*

Joanna McEaney: *Chair of AFCA (Foster carers association)*

Tanisha Frazer: *Care Leaver Ambassador*

Anne Marie Benbow: *Care Leaver Ambassador*

Appendix 2: Developments in Legislation

- New guidance outlining how social workers and other professionals should support children in care and care leavers was published by the Department for Education in February 2018, in line with the Children and Social Work Act 2017.
- The first [education for children in and previously in care](#) outlines key duties for professionals involved with these groups of children and young people are outlined in the guidance, as the government announced extra funding for the implementation and money for new projects for care leavers. For looked-after children in schools, the new guidance said:
- [The Care Leaver Covenant](#) is a promise made by private, public or voluntary organisations to provide support for care leavers aged 16-25 to help them to live independently.
- [UASC Statutory Guidance 2017](#)
- Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, published February 2018. [Chapter 22](#) focuses on care leavers.

“Social workers, Virtual School Heads, Independent Reviewing Officers, school admission officers, and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) departments should work together to ensure that, except in an emergency, appropriate education provision for a child is arranged at the same time as a care placement.”

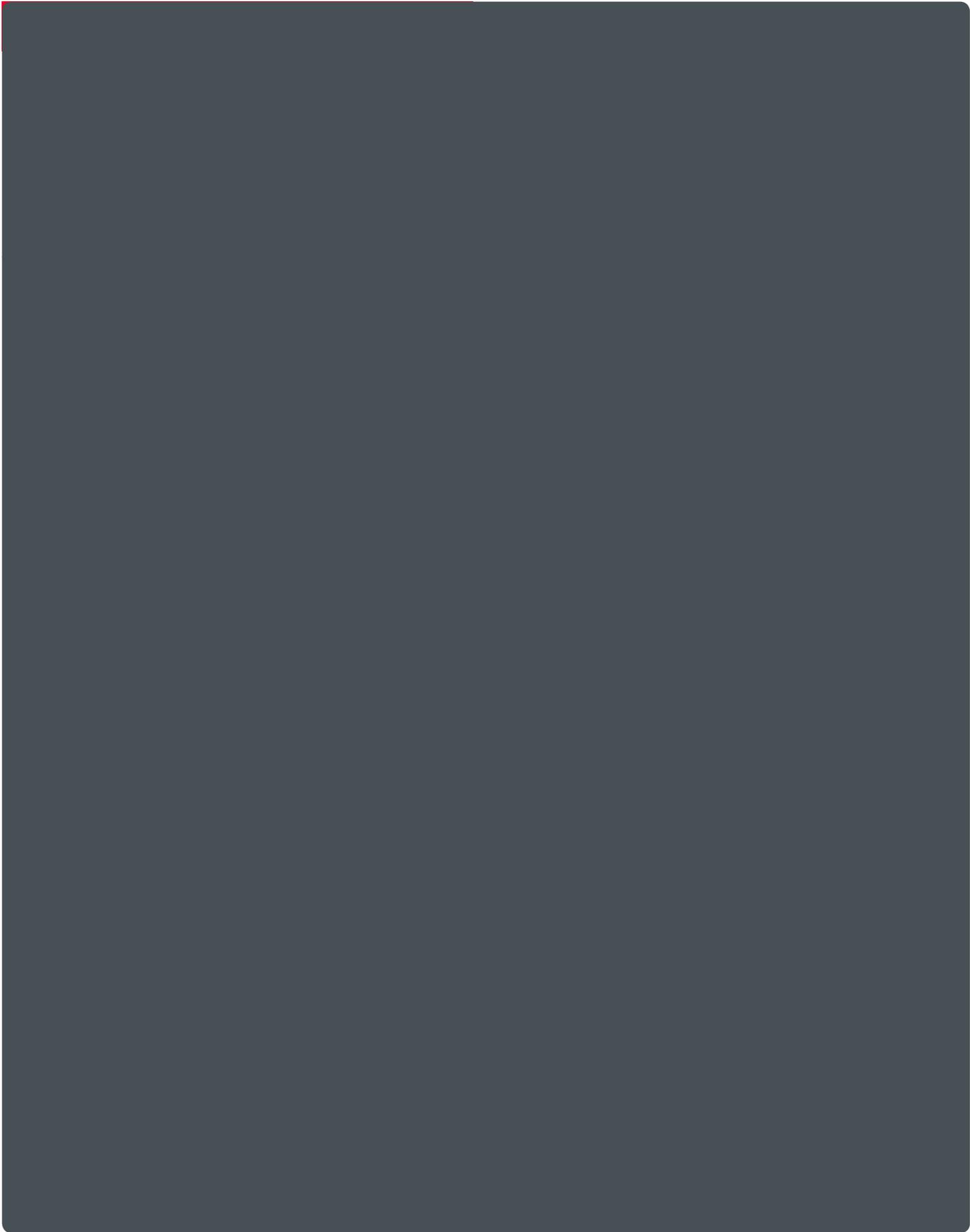
The second extends personal adviser support to all care leavers to the age of 25 and advises how this should be implemented ([duty to 25](#))

- Care Leaver Covenant, launched November 2018: In July 2016, the Government published [Keep on Caring](#) to support young people from care to independence. A key policy commitment in the paper is a strategic pledge to introduce a Care Leaver Covenant.

Appendix 3 – Performance

Children in care – Bristol	2013	2014	2015	2016	2018	Latest England Average
Rate per 10,000 of children looked after aged under 18 years (as at 31 March)	80	77	76	73	69	64
No. of children in care (as at 31 March)	715	695	700	675	665	-
No. of children looked after continuously for at least 12 months as at 31 March	490	495	485	-	-	-
No. of children who ceased to be looked after, yr ending 31 March	275	325	310	380	278 (rate per 10,000 = 30)	(rate per 10,000 = 25)
%Looked after children with SEN Without Statement/Support	34.5	31.8	31.9	-	-	-
%Looked after children with SEN With Statement/EHC Plan	32.2	33.2	31.9	-	-	27
Stability of Placements - % with 3 or more placements in	-	-	8.0	11.6	9	10
Stability of Placements - % looked after for at least 2.5 yrs and in same placement for at least 2 yrs	-	-	68.0	72.4	74	70
% of children looked after at 31 March, placed more than 20 miles from their homes, outside LA boundary	10.0	11.0	12.0	14.0	18	19
Crime - % of children looked after (aged 10+) convicted or subject to a final warning or reprimand during the year	7.0	6.3	10.0	11.4	2	4
% Looked after Children Missing from Care	-	-	9.0	6.83	13	11
Persistent Absence (PA) - % children looked after for at least 12 months classed as persistent absentees (6 terms from 2013)	5.6	6.9	7.8	-		
Exclusion - % of children looked after for at least twelve months with at least one fixed term exclusion	15.2	15.0	-	-		

PE219b Health assessment			92	81.8	85	88
PE219a Dental checks			82	70.8	84	84
PE258 Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire completion				78	83	78
PE142a Care Leavers in suitable accommodation aged 17 and 18				90.5	-	-
PE142a Care Leavers in suitable accommodation aged 19 to 21				90.5	90	-
PE036a Care Leavers in Education, Training and Employment aged 17 or 18				57.5	61	64
PE036a Care Leavers in Education, Training and Employment aged 19 to 21				57.5	55	51
PE202 School aged children in care for 6 months or more with a Personal Education Plan				65.2		



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