

SCC's Children and Young  
People's

# Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2024/25

December 2025  
Strong forever families,  
Great outcomes for children







## Our vision

We want all children and young people in SCC to get a good start in life, live safely, be healthy and happy and go on to have successful opportunities in adulthood

# Contents

<b>What corporate parenting means to us</b>	5
Our corporate parenting panel	7
<b>Setting the scene</b>	
Our corporate parenting values	8
Child focused care planning	8
Profile of children in care and care leavers	10
Service stability and capacity	11
Our corporate parenting strategy	11
Key areas for improvement	14
<b>Priority One: Safe and Secure</b>	
Smooth transition into care	15
Securing early permanence	15
Stable accommodation and relationships	16
Close to home	16
Children and young people who go missing from home	16
Pathways Planning for care leavers	17
Good quality accommodation for care leavers	17
Preparation for adulthood	18
<b>Priority Two: Happy and Healthy</b>	
Physical, emotional health and wellbeing services for the children and young people in our care	19
Health assessments	20
Dental checks	20
Substance use	20
<b>Priority Three: Resilient and engaged</b>	20
Listening and acting on the views, wishes and feelings of our children and young people	21
<b>Priority Four: Enjoying and achieving</b>	
Our virtual school	22
Personal Education Plans	23
Education, Employment and Training for Care Leavers	23
<b>Appendix: Data Charts</b>	25

# What corporate parenting means to us

---



**Rob Henderson**  
Executive Director  
Children & Learning



**Cllr Barnes Andrews**  
Cabinet Member for Children &  
Learning

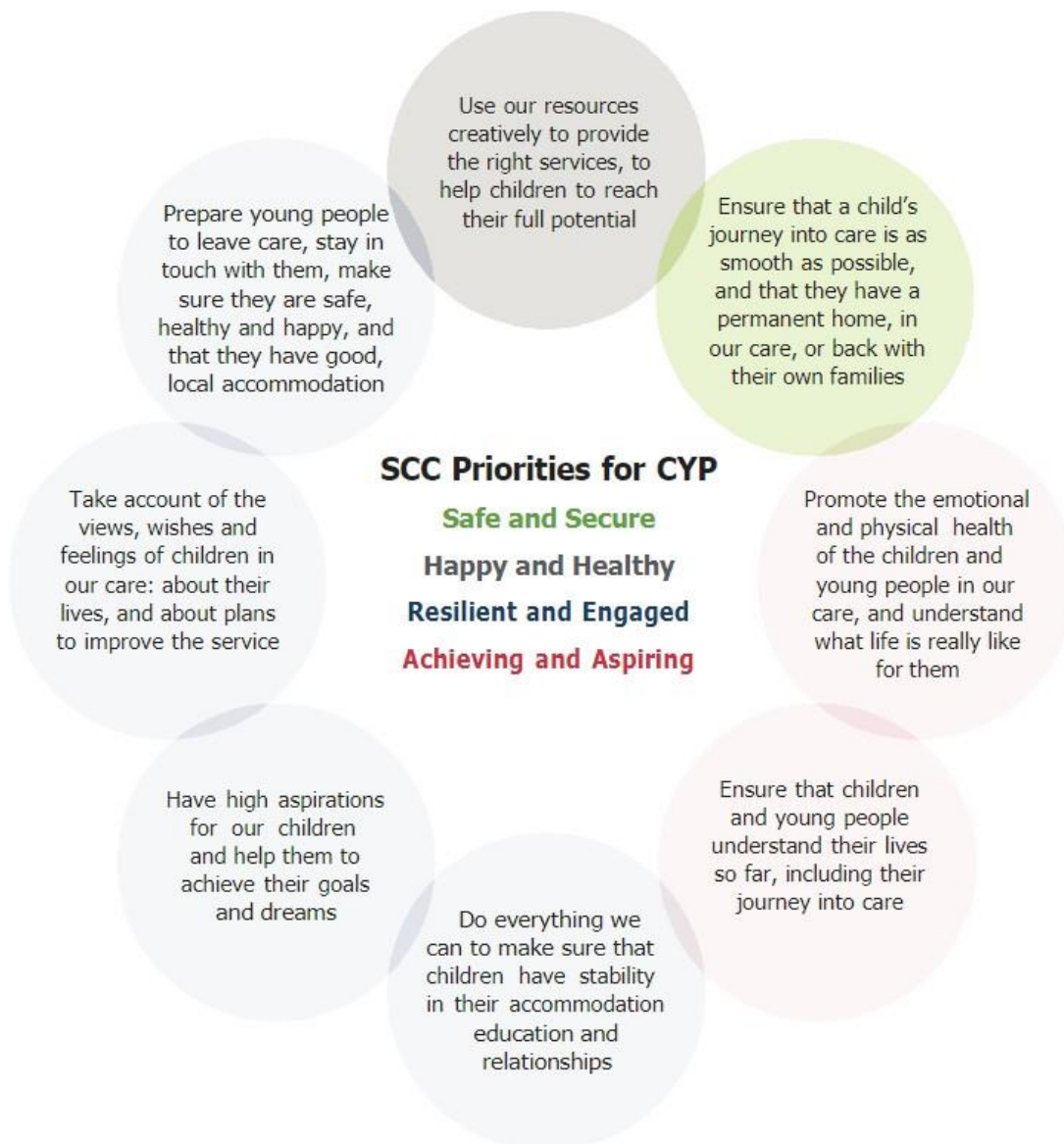
Looking after children is one of the most important things a council does. When a child comes into care in Southampton City council (SCC) we become their 'Corporate Parent.' This means that everyone involved with the council (the people who work in the council, the elected councillors and the managers) must make sure that SCC, and our key partners such as police, health and education, are the best parents possible. Together as a council we should advocate for and support every child in care in the same way as a good parent would. We should always ask ourselves, "would this be good enough for my child?".

The Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) provides robust assurance of the whole corporate parenting system, ensuring we are the very best corporate parent to SCC children and young people; and that all children in our care, and care leavers, can achieve their full potential. The CPP does this by putting the voice of children, foster carers and service users at the centre. The CPP ensures that the council and its partner agencies uphold the highest corporate parenting principles. The foundation of our work is laid down in our Corporate Parenting Strategy which sets out our commitments to children in care and care leavers about how we will care for and support them.

The CPP may enquire into any service for children in our care (across the system including social care, health, education, leisure, policing, housing and transport) that contributes to their outcomes.

As we continue this journey, we call on the Corporate Parenting Panel to **champion bold ambition, challenge partners purposefully**, and **drive forward the improvements that will transform children's lives**. We ask the Panel not only to scrutinise and assure, but to *inspire*, to *advocate*, and to *lead with the conviction that every child in the care of SCC deserves excellence*—so that together, we build a city where all children in our care and care leavers can thrive, belong and succeed.

The work of the CPP is underpinned by the Eight Corporate Parenting Principles enshrined in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 below.



It encompasses other legal responsibilities set out in the Children Act 1989, Children Act 2004, Leaving Care Act 2000 and Care Planning Regulations, outlining how local authorities and multi- agency partners must work together to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children and young people in our care and those leaving care.

In essence, it is how the entire council, and our partner agencies, see themselves as the parents of SCC's children in care. This is to ensure that they have a better and safer experience in our care and that they aspire, achieve, and succeed as children and as adults in the communities where they live.

---

Elected members and senior leaders in SCC perform their corporate parenting duties through:

- Holding children in care and care leavers in mind throughout all their council work, supporting engagement events and using a 'corporate parenting lens', when making decisions that affect the lives of children in care and care leavers
- Regular meetings between the Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Social Care and the Executive Director for Children's Learning and Wellbeing Service, including monthly Cabinet Member's briefings
- Scrutiny of reports at the Corporate Parenting Panel and Children and Families Scrutiny Panel
- Engaging with Representatives from SCC Voices Unite (previously the Children in Care Council) at relevant meetings
- Being made aware of, and taking a proactive interest in, matters that affect children in care and care leavers, between formal meetings and briefings.

This report outlines we have delivered on the corporate parenting principles that SCC has adopted throughout 2024/25 and outlines our plans for continual improvement as set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022 - 2027.

We invite challenge, scrutiny, and collective celebration of success, much as a family would.

## **Our Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP)**

The core purpose of our Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) is to act, collectively, as a good parent, scrutinising how effectively the council and its partner agencies safeguard and promote children's wellbeing.

The Panel examines thematic reports from multi-agency services operating under the corporate parenting umbrella, considering performance data, health assessments, education outcomes, and the experiences of children and young people. Standard agenda items include a focused discussion on the voice of children and young people, a Head of Service report, and an action tracker that monitors progress against agreed actions.

The CPP also assures senior leaders by highlighting areas of concern, reviewing updates on vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and those at risk of exploitation, and challenging services to improve practice where needed. Through its enquiry into any service affecting children in our care, including social care, health, education, housing, and leisure, the Panel fosters cross-system accountability and continuous improvement.

# Setting the scene

## Our corporate parenting values

We are committed to being strong champions and advocates for all children in our care and care leavers, taking a persistent, uncompromising approach to giving them the care a good parent would. We ensure every child is nurtured, supported, and feels loved. We believe permanence provides the strongest foundation for children to thrive into adulthood. These children are **our** children, and we hold high aspirations for each one.

Every young person is unique, and we must recognise their individual identities, needs, and family contexts. We prioritise building trusting, lasting relationships so children feel safe to share their wishes, feelings, anxieties, and hopes. Listening to them, and taking full account of their views in decisions that affect their lives, is essential to good corporate parenting.

## Child-focused care planning

Listening to children and young people is fundamental to effective care planning. From the moment a child enters care, we should prioritise:

- **Consultation:** actively seeking children's or young people's opinions on specific issues or questions.
- **Participation:** encouraging children and young people to be involved in decision-making processes.
- **Involvement:** providing opportunities and support for children and young people to engage with adults in meaningful ways.

Our approach is centred on strengths, focusing on and celebrating the successes and achievements of each child. When addressing concerns, we carefully consider how to explore these matters with the child and ensure that our approach remains solution focused.

We prioritise gathering and sharing information in ways that are meaningful and contribute to each child and young person's life story.

Ultimately, we strive to understand the child's perspective, asking ourselves, 'What is life like for this child right now?' By listening to and valuing their lived experience, we gain insights that allow us to refine our services to best meet the needs of young people.

Each child in our care has a Care Plan, created through collaboration with the child, the parent(s) and multi-agency partners. This plan represents the shared responsibility of the local authority and partner agencies (including Education, Health, and others) to deliver the highest quality care for our children and young people.

At the heart of every Care Plan is the goal of achieving permanence. This provides a child with security, continuity, commitment, and identity, ensuring they have a stable, loving family to support them through childhood and beyond.

## Profile of children in care and care leavers

Over time, SCC is seeing a steadily reducing number of children in care. On 1 April 2024 SCC cared for 488 children, reducing to 462 on 1 April 2025. This indicates a reduction of children in care of 5.3%. The downward trend also includes the number and rate of children coming into care, where the data shows that there was a reduction of 34 children coming into care in the period 2024-25 compared with 2023-24.

The rate of children in our care on 31 March 2025 was 90 per 10k, compared with 97 per 10,000 on 31 March 2024. This however remains above our statistical neighbour average. The reduction in the number of children in our care has been achieved through ongoing reunification and permanence planning alongside intensive work to keep children at home within their family networks where this is safe and appropriate.

<p><b>Gender at birth:</b></p> <p>65% of children in care are male, and 35% are female. The gender distribution of children and young people in our care has remained relatively consistent over the past four years.</p>	
<p><b>Ethnicity:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 75% White</li> <li>• 9% Mixed Heritage</li> <li>• 5% Other Ethnic Groups</li> <li>• 5% Black or Black British</li> <li>• 4% Asian or Asian British</li> <li>• 2% Other</li> </ul>	<p><b>Age:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 12.5% Sixteen plus</li> <li>• 33% ten to fifteen years old</li> <li>• 21.5% five to nine years old</li> <li>• 17% one to four years old</li> <li>• 16% under one</li> </ul>

Our cohort of children in care is generally younger than they were in 23/24. There is a much smaller proportion of children in our care aged 16 and over, down from 21% to 12.5%. The percentage of children under one increased slightly from 15% to 16%. The percentage of children aged 5-9 years increased from 16.5% in 2024 to 21.5% in 2025.

In the financial year 2024-2025, the breakdown of children in care by their legal status was as follows:

- 65% were under **full care orders**, meaning they were placed in the care of local authorities with a long-term commitment.
- 14% were on **interim care orders**, which typically indicate a temporary arrangement while decisions about their future are being made.
- 18% were under **Section 20 agreements**, where children are voluntarily accommodated by local authorities with parental consent, often on a short-term basis. This also includes the majority of our Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.
- 2% had **placement orders** granted, meaning that a care plan for adoption had been agreed and that the Local Authority were seeking a suitable adoption placement.

This distribution reflects the different legal mechanisms for placing children in local authority care.

Between April 2024 and March 2025, 176 children came into the care of SCC and 210 left our care. Sufficiency of placements continues to be a challenge as we continually strive to recruit more in-house carers, source good quality registered residential provision, launch our own supported lodgings scheme (Homes for teens) and open our own children's homes.

Care leavers in SCC are a growing and increasingly diverse group of young people for whom the council holds a lifelong corporate parenting responsibility. As of April 2025, 356 care leavers were supported by the local authority, reflecting a steady rise year-on-year and emphasising the importance of strong transition planning and sustained support into adulthood. Around 25% of our care leavers are age 21-25. SCC's vision for children and young people, ensuring they are safe, healthy, happy, and equipped for successful futures, extends into our care leaver offer, which includes specialist housing support, participation opportunities, improved oversight of accommodation, and strengthened pathways into education, employment, and training. The Council remains ambitious for its care leavers, focusing on stability, independence, and ensuring their voices shape the services designed to help them thrive.

[Our Local Offer For Care Leavers in Southampton City Council 2025](#)

## **Service stability and capacity**

The service was strengthened following the service redesign in June 2024, including the introduction of Assistant Team Managers giving the service additional management capacity, increasing social work capacity with two additional social work posts, family coach posts introduced to support with parenting and reunification work, and one additional business support post. We have since added two personal advisor posts to meet the demands of the rising care leaver cohort, and to enable us to ensure co-allocation to children in care at 16 years old.

There are six teams within the Pathways through Care service, two of which are for care leavers, an additional team is specifically working with unaccompanied children and care leavers, the three other teams with children in care under the age of 18. The Staying Connected (Staying Close) Team provides floating support to care leavers over the age of 18 in Staying Connected properties. The service is cohesive, nurturing and child focused.

We have also benefited from an additional secondment to create a therapeutic role within the providing additional support for our children in placements.

Over the past year agency rates in the service have remained low with only two agency social workers and one agency team manager covering vacancies while we recruit.

## **Corporate parenting strategy:**

Our Corporate Parenting Strategy outlines our priorities for children in care and care leavers. Drawing on the requirements of the Social Work Act 2017 and the eight corporate parenting principles, it sets out our priorities and the actions to ensure that no child in the care of the local authority is 'left behind'. The strategy was developed in consultation with children and young people, carers and partner agencies.

SCC is one of the authorities nationally that is to be subject to local government re-organisation. Ordinarily, we would be reviewing our strategy and consulting children and young people, in 2025/26. However, formal consultation will now take place when the new local authority is recreated, after 2027.

---

## Areas for further improvement

- **Increasing our ambition for our corporate parenting responsibilities**, including continually refreshing and driving forward the 10-step corporate parenting plan.
- **Strengthening placement stability** for children in care through targeted support, improved practice oversight, and increasing suitable placement options.
- **Improving the quality of supervision and recording**, ensuring clear analysis and a consistent 'golden thread' across children and young people's plans.
- **Broadening and strengthening participation and engagement opportunities**, offering a wider range of meaningful co-production opportunities and activities for children, young people, and care leavers, ensuring their voices actively shape our priorities.
- **Increasing employment and education opportunities**, further developing the NEET panel and increasing access to apprenticeships and exploring a council mentoring scheme for care leavers.
- **Improving pathway planning**, with a stronger focus on co-production, ensuring they reflect significant events, include all the right people who can provide support and include how we help care leavers to understand their life journeys.
- **Strengthening support for independence and transition to adulthood** through earlier planning, more proactive, coordinated support. This includes helping care leavers to use health passports and the NHS App and embedding our independence skills training.
- **Expanding placement options for 16–17-year-olds**, particularly through the registration and launch of our 'Homes for Teens' provision.
- **Increasing consistency** in applying the Care Leavers' Local Offer across all services and practitioners.
- **Increasing suitable local housing options** for care leavers, including access to additional council tenancies and more accommodation choices for UASC young people.
- **Strengthening mental health support**, widening the focus beyond therapeutic interventions and recruiting to clinical lead posts.
- **Addressing disproportionality** through improved data, targeted action, and inclusive practice.
- Ensuring that we have an increasingly efficient and equitable process for **managing the savings of children in care**.

# Keeping Children and Young People Safe and Secure

---

## Smooth transition into care

Coming into care can be stressful and overwhelming. Social workers play a vital role in ensuring this experience is as smooth as possible, introducing children to their new carers in person, checking in within the first week, and ensuring clear plans are in place for immediate and future care. Practice Standards set the minimum expectations for visits and placement planning. Each child is allocated an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), whose responsibilities include gathering the child's wishes and feelings, overseeing their care plan, and ensuring accountability and high-quality decision-making. A review meeting must be held within 20 working days, involving the child, their parents, carers, and key professionals. After each review, the IRO writes to the child in clear, accessible language, translated if needed.

The IRO continually evaluates whether the child is in care for the right reasons, explores the possibility of reunification with family or connected persons, and carries out mid-point progress checks to ensure plans remain on track. Performance indicators remain strong: 91% of decisions are shared within required timescales, 88% of reviews are completed on time, and letters to children following reviews are sent in 100% of cases. Over the year, 1,251 reviews were completed, with 84.1% of children who were of the age and understanding to contribute participated within the review. When children could not express views directly advocates supported them. This support was in place for 20% of children. When issues arise in care planning, the IRO initiates the Case Resolution Process, escalating concerns if needed. Between April 2024 and March 2025, 80 problem resolutions were initiated. The IRO service also works with Workforce Development to provide training and resources, and quality assurance clinics—now fully embedded—help identify performance issues, drive improvement, and celebrate progress, supported by reliable performance data.

## Securing early permanence

For some children and young people, permanence is achieved by staying in our care. For others, it is achieved through adoption, a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or by returning to their parents, when this is the right decision for them.

11 fewer children left our care in the year 2024-25, compared to the previous year. Similarly, 23 fewer children returned home to their parent's care. This was expected following the initial focus on reunification in 2023/24 when many of the more straightforward reunifications were achieved, leaving the more complex family arrangements. Reunifications will remain at the core of our practice with children who are new into care and those in care longer term through their care planning, review process and permanence planning.

The number of children being adopted or being placed under an SGO has not changed significantly with a slight reduction of 2%. It is worth noting that as the process for SGOs becomes more time efficient there could be a higher number of children coming out of care in the next year.

## Stable accommodation and relationships

Placement stability is a core value for leadership and the entire service. There are two measures for placement stability, the percentage of children in our care with three or more placements within the last 12 months, and the percentage of children in our care for more than 2.5 years, where children have been

in their current placement for more than 2 years. The former saw a positive decrease to 14%, bringing us closer to the national and statistical neighbour averages. However, over the summer of 2025 there was further instability in placements with this stability measure returning to 18% in November 2025. There is currently a review looking at the experiences of this cohort of children to inform our learning and practice. The latter measure of long-term stability has improved to 63% in April 2025 and has continued to improve to 67% in November 2025.

## Close to home

Where possible, it is preferable for children and young people in our care to be placed within or near to Southampton so that they can continue to build relationships and receive support from their professional networks, remain in their education settings, and most importantly maintain relationships with their family and friends. Due to national and local placement sufficiency challenges, we rely on placements for children beyond those within our own resources. In 2024-25, 19% of children were living 20 or more miles from home, this is slightly higher than the statistical neighbour average, but lower than the South-East regional average (23%).

## Children & young people who go missing from our care

Our data shows that during 2024-25, 12% of children and young people went missing, up from 10% in the previous year. This is the same rate as the South-East region average, and 1.5% higher than the statistical neighbour average. Some children go missing repeatedly during the year, while others rarely or never go missing.

We meet with children and young people who go missing from our care, and we collaborate with multi-agency professionals, to explore strategies for reducing incidents and identifying the risk factors that contribute to them going missing. The police play a key role in sharing information and coordinating efforts to ensure a collective approach that helps to keep children and young people safer. They also work closely with partners to disrupt those who seek to sexually or criminally exploit them.

To better understand why children and young people in our care go missing, we offer each one a return home interview (RHI). We extend this interview offer to nearly every child, and, on average, over 70% of them accept the offer.

The team who co-ordinate our response to missing children routinely circulates information about this cohort to managers across the service, prompting curiosity, senior leadership oversight and progression of key actions. The '3 in 28' meeting now involves all teams across the service, with an expectation that the relevant managers will take a lead in understanding the missing episodes, providing support and reducing risks. Ensuring there is golden thread between needs and risks identified in Return Home Interviews and these becoming key parts of care planning for these children and that progress is monitored through supervision and reviews.

## Pathway planning for care leavers

The Pathways Through Care service is responsible for conducting a pathway needs assessment when a child reaches 15 years and nine months, if they are expected to remain in care and eventually transition into being a care leaver. By the time the child reaches 16 years and three months, it is expected that they will have a pathway plan. This plan outlines the young person's future life goals as they approach adulthood, including their housing plans, education and training goals, career aspirations, and the support they will receive regarding their health, safety, and well-being. We are steadily working towards all care leavers being allocated a PA within one month of their 16th birthday.

We are also working on implementing an additional needs assessment at 20 years and nine months to allow care leavers to reassess their life goals and determine whether they would like to continue receiving support until the age of 25.

A high percentage of pathway plans are completed on time, with 96% finalised within the set timeframe. These plans are written in clear, accessible language tailored to the individual goals and needs of each young person. They are also quality-assured by the manager of the allocated personal advisor. However, further efforts are needed to ensure that pathway plans are consistently completed on time and that young people are fully engaged in the process.

## **Good quality accommodation for care leavers**

Our data for 2024-25 shows that 94% of our care leavers are in touch with the service and 80% are living in suitable accommodation. Following a sharper focus on housing options and suitability this improved to 86% in suitable accommodation in November 2025.

The weekly multi-agency housing panel is led by the Homelessness Manager, with regular involvement by the Pathways Through Care service. There is further work needed to ensure that all care leavers receive support to secure and maintain appropriate accommodation. For most, this involves a gradual reduction in support and increased opportunities for independence.

Placing a care leaver in bed and breakfast accommodation is considered only as a very last resort, after all other options have been thoroughly explored and found unfeasible. If this becomes necessary, or a care leaver is deemed to be living in unsuitable accommodation, a risk assessment is completed by their personal advisor, which must be approved by the manager and Director for Children's Social Care. The duration of unsuitable accommodation is kept as short as possible, tailored support is provided, and the young person is presented at the next housing panel for review.

An agreement remains in place with the Local Authority Housing Department, allowing up to 10 care leavers annually, who are assessed to meet specific age and tenancy readiness criteria, to secure permanent tenancies in local authority housing. This rose to 15 in April 2025. In addition, all care leavers who are 'ready for their own front door' are added to the housing register, enabling children's services and Housing to work together strategically and creatively to meet the housing needs of this cohort.

Care leavers who have obtained tenancies through this process have so far been successful in maintaining them. The eligibility age for care leavers to secure their own tenancy has been reduced from 21 to 18, with readiness being a more significant factor than age.

The percentage of 19–21-year-olds living with a former foster carer remains higher than those of statistical neighbours and England due to the strength of our Staying Put offer.

## **Preparation for adulthood**

As good corporate parents we recognise the importance of helping children in care and care leavers to learn the importance of savings and managing their money. As good parents we should also use council resources to assist children in care to save for their futures.

Some carers, particularly private providers, have not been good at consistently putting savings away for children in our care. We have developed a process to hold children's savings at source. This is administered centrally within the council and added annually to their Junior Savings ISA accounts, which young people can access when they turn 18. We have worked with our externally commissioned providers to ensure that savings are taken at source from fees paid to providers. We have a revised savings policy to ensure that we have a consistent means of putting away savings and providing pocket money for our children and young people.

# Happy and Healthy

---

## Physical, emotional health and wellbeing services for children and young people in our care

The NHS Hampshire, SCC, and Isle of Wight Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Solent NHS Trust continue to provide for the health and wellbeing of children in our care.

- When a child comes into care, they should have an initial health assessment (IHA) within 20 working days. Thereafter, children under five have a further review every six months and older children are reviewed annually. Our performance in achieving the 20-day timescale is improving, and tracking of these children is substantially better, with most delays kept to a minimum and a child-by-child analysis completed each month.
- Health assessments for children in care have been prioritised by Solent NHS Trust Looked After Children's Health Team. Regular meetings are held between the health team and service managers in the safeguarding service and PTC. Accessible appointments are offered in the young people's hub for those over 13.
- Online strengths and difficulties questionnaires (SDQs) have been completed maintaining contact with and oversight of children placed out of areas and improving multi-agency involvement to help promote the emotional and mental wellbeing of children and young people in care.
- We are working with community dental teams to improve dental care services children in care and reestablishing a mobile dental service for those with acute dental needs.
- We have undertaken joint audits with local authority partners and CAMHS to explore the access, quality, needs, and areas of improvement relating to the emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people in care.
- To improve health provision for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), Solent NHS Trust has developed a specialized pack and revised operating procedures. These changes have led to improvements in identifying age, physical health, immunisation status (currently 83%, up from 69%), and BCG scars (currently 83%, up from 50%). Further improvements are planned in areas such as blood infection screening, BMI recording, infectious disease monitoring, consent, drug use, emotional Support and PTSD symptoms.
- Sexual health is discussed during health assessments when relevant, and referrals to additional services made as necessary. The Looked After Health team has received sexual exploitation training, using Barnardo's 'Spotting the Signs' tool. When risk factors are identified, they are discussed with the child before a referral is made to their social worker and the sexual health outreach team.
- A 'decliner pathway' with Solent NHS Trust has been approved which clarifies how health providers will seek the consent of those with parental responsibility to provide health assessments and treatment in the best interest of a child where they decline to give their own consent.

---

## Health Assessments

In the year April 2024 – March 2025, 87.8% of children in our care have their annual health assessment. This is up slightly from 87% in 23/24 and in line with the Southeast Region average of 87%, but not as high as our statistical neighbour average of 92.5%. This reflects the challenges of our health colleagues who were managing staff vacancies during Q3 and 4 of 24/25, limiting the availability of appointments.

## Dental Checks

90.5% of children in our care were recorded as having their teeth checked by a dentist in the year April 2024 – March 2025. This is up from 81.4% the previous year, and higher than both our Southeast Regional average (77%) and our statistical neighbour average (80.7%). There continues to be a gap in our recording of dental check-ups in year, resulting in the current rate of 49%. The difference between this low figure and the 90.5% is the process of updating records ahead of the statutory returns. Improving this recording is an ongoing focus for the service.

## Substance use

4% of children in our care were identified as having a substance use problem during the year. This is in-line with our regional and statistical neighbours. Children in care and care leavers receive coordinated multi-agency support to address substance and alcohol misuse through early intervention, health promotion, and specialist treatment. Partners across health, social care, education, and the community promote healthy lifestyles, increase awareness of substance-related harm, and encourage access to mental health services where trauma is a factor. Referral pathways ensure professionals can secure specialist assessment and treatment, supporting young people as they move toward independence. Access to substance misuse services also provides practical, evidence-based support to families where parental substance use affects safety, strengthening protective networks around children.

# Resilient and Engaged

---

## Listening and acting on the views, wishes and feelings of our children and young people

### Participation and Engagement of Children, Young People and Care Leavers

A local charity, Youth Options, supported young people to participate in the children in care council, providing insights to the Corporate Parenting Committee. Youth Options delivered six consultations and three activity days, including paid youth roles in planning and delivery. Young people regularly attend Corporate Parenting Panel to present on findings and hear service leader responses. Participation activity during 2024–25 broadened and diversified, moving beyond statutory forums to emphasise co-production, research, and city-wide engagement. A Young Researchers programme was commissioned to generate practical recommendations on youth voice mechanisms, explicitly aimed at seldom-heard groups, and to embed findings within the Pathways Consortium and council policy frameworks. A full-time participation officer is due to commence employment in January 2026, to continue to drive this critical agenda, and further improve our co-production.

### Access to Advocacy and Independent Visiting

In 2023-24, children engaged in their care plan reviews through various means: 60.7% spoke for themselves during the meeting, 12.3% had an advocate present, 8.4% shared their views in writing, and 0.7% made non-verbal contributions. Additionally, 14% of children were under the age of 4, 11 children (0.8%) attended their review without contributing, and for 44 children (3.2%), the IRO could not determine their views.

SCC commissions *The Advocacy People* to deliver advocacy and independent visiting services for children and young people in care. Through a needs-based, person-centred approach, *The Advocacy People* assist children in expressing their views about their care and life circumstances, while also providing a consistent point of contact to support their well-being. The service manager overseeing the IRO service is responsible for liaising with *The Advocacy People* and attends quarterly commissioning meetings. Additionally, during the initial review, the IRO service ensures advocacy services are offered to children.

In 2023-24, the annual target set in accordance with Barnardo's recommendation, which suggests 10% of children in care should receive advocacy services, was surpassed. A key change this year has been the transition to an 'opt-out' service for newly arrived children in care, ensuring that all school-aged children are fully informed of their right to an advocate. By the end of 2023-24, 41 children had an allocated Independent Visitor, a number that grew to 60 by the end of December 2024.

# Achieving and Aspiring

## Our virtual school

Every local authority must have a designated headteacher of a virtual school who has overall responsibility for promoting the educational achievement of children and young people in the care of the local authority. The Virtual School action plan for academic year 2024-25 had the following objectives:

- To promote and embed the virtual school advisory service for children with a social worker (CWSW ever 6)
- To secure improving attainment and progress
- To raise attendance
- To reduce suspensions and monitor education provision
- To promote positive participation
- To support Post-16 Transition
- To offer bespoke support for targeted cohorts of children with experience of care
- To provide support, advice and challenge for those supporting our SEND children
- To deliver appropriate training and opportunity for professional development

The virtual school head teacher has responsibility and accountability for making sure that there are effective arrangements in place for allocating pupil premium plus funding to benefit our children. The funding is £26300 per pupil, of which £900 is dedicated to the Virtual School service. The grant must be managed by the virtual school and used to improve outcomes and “diminish the difference” as identified in the child’s personal education plan in consultation with the designated teacher for the school.

- Year 11 summer 2026 PP+ will be retained to support transitions post 16
- A PEP tracker is in place with oversight from the VSH and DHT to weekly dip sample PP+ spend
- Social care team managers and IROs will be updated monthly with any concerns related to inappropriate PP+ use
- Designated teachers will be contacted individually by the VS and Head teachers will be contacted to confirm that pupil premium plus will be withheld if PEPs are not completed. This will also be communicated in the autumn term mailing sent to all designated teachers.
- Additional post-16 pupil premium has been secured from the treasury. This will enable more robust support.

### Virtual School Overview of the Academic Year 2024-2025

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early years foundation stage 8.3% increase from last year on achieving GLD (good level of development)</li> <li>• Phonics screen at KS2 4.9% above national comparator</li> <li>• KS4 A8 has improved by 5.4%</li> <li>• 9-5 Maths             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 12.0% measure better than national 2024 comparator</li> <li>○ We have seen an improvement of 11.4% from last year.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>EBacc:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have seen an increase of 4.9% of pupils being entered for this suite of qualifications.</li> <li>• Against a national comparator this is 9.5% higher.</li> <li>• % 9-5 4.3% measure better than national 2024 comparator</li> <li>• We have seen an improvement of 1.8% from last year.</li> <li>• % 9-4 2.3% measure better than national 2024 comparator</li> </ul>
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

# Achieving and Aspiring

## Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

Personal education plans are mandatory and written three times a year, produced collaboratively between the child's social worker, schoolteachers, foster carers, and the virtual school. PEPs are the core means by which all these professionals work together to develop a plan that reviews the child's education progress, identifies what their ongoing learning, mental and emotional wellbeing needs are, develops plans for how they will be supported in all aspects of their learning, and sets clear targets so we know when we are making a difference.

Electronic personal education plans were introduced in September 2017 and have been revised based on feedback from children, young people, and professionals. Full training on completing PEPs continues to be provided through the virtual school to carers and professionals. Any school requesting additional support will have a bespoke offer tailored to their needs. The virtual school also has a personal education plan tracker to ensure timely completion of PEPs and to regularly review and rate their quality.

## Education, employment, and training (EET) for care leavers

Figures for financial year 2024-25 show that 60% of our care leavers aged 17 and 18, and 45% aged 19-21 were in education, employment, or training (EET). That is a 5% increase compared to 2023-2024 for 17- and 18-year-olds, and a 7% increase for 19–21-year-olds.

35% of care leavers were in higher education, this is lower than our statistical neighbour average of 51%, the Southeast Region average of 44% and the England average of 48%.

A significant number of our care leavers are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) due to being too unwell to be available for work. The majority of this illness relates to their emotional/mental health.

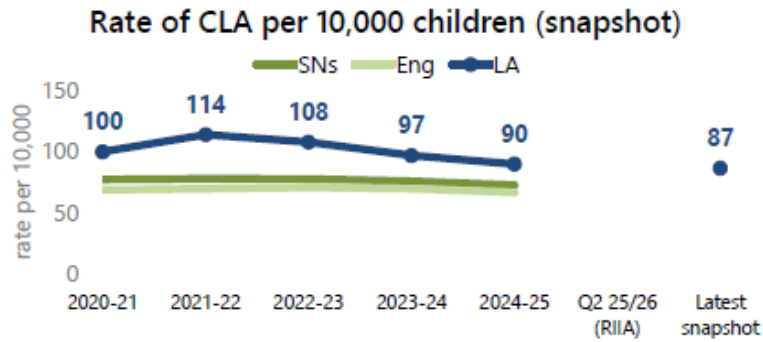
We continue to underperform in our numbers of care leavers who are in employment, education, or training on a national, regional, and statistical neighbour level. This is an area of improvement also recognised in our most recent inspection findings.

Increasing employment, training, and education opportunities remains a priority improvement area, and a range of focused activities are in place to secure better outcomes:

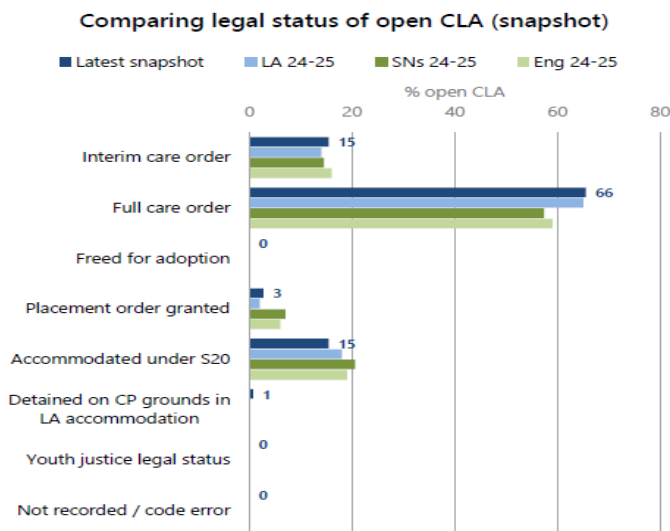
- Improved monitoring and evaluation of personal education plans (PEPs) for children in year 10 and 11 to sure we are comprehensively preparing them for the next stage in their lives.
- Ensured that all 'in-house' SCC Apprenticeships are advertised early for one week within the Pathways Through Care service, prior to being advertised elsewhere. In the coming year we are going to build on this with the 'Care Leaver Guarantee', which now has executive member sign off, ensuring that across the whole of the council care leavers become a priority for apprenticeship opportunities that we offer.
- The monthly well-established NEET panel consists of both Service managers for Pathways Through care, reviewing young people's progress alongside the virtual school, the Employment Hub, managers, PAs, social workers and the post-16 manager. The panel to focuses robustly on young people who are NEET.
- We have increased the number of personal advisors to ensure more targeted support to care leavers and to ensure we can properly support all care leavers who want or need us in their lives, up to age 25.

# Appendix – Data Charts

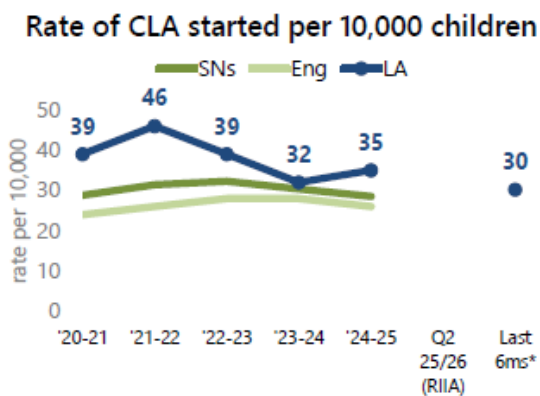
The data in this report is a combination of financial year data and school year data, to enable us to scrutinise our performance against our statistical neighbours, but also to help our understanding of children’s education progress.



## Children in our care on 31 March 2025 (rate per 10,000 population)

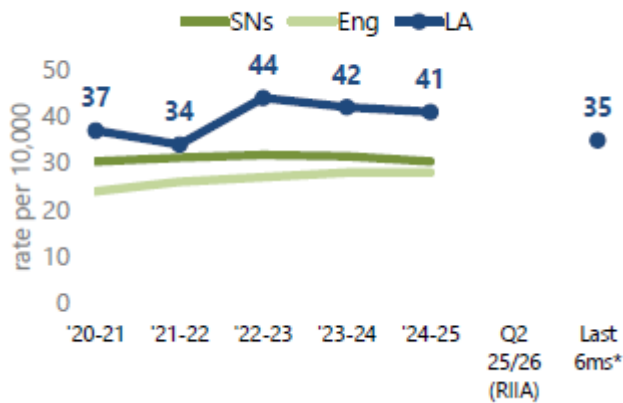


**Children who started to be looked after in the year (rate per 10,000 population):** This is an equal rate per 10k of children compared to statistical neighbours, although slightly higher than England.

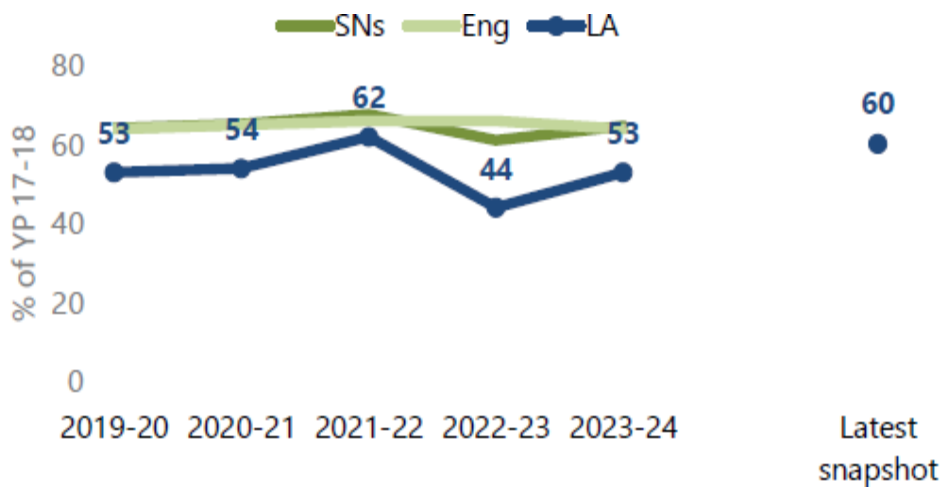


**Children who ceased to be looked after in the year (rate per 10,000 population):**  
 210 children (rate 42 per 10k) ceased to be looked after during 2024-25 continued the increased rate from previous years.

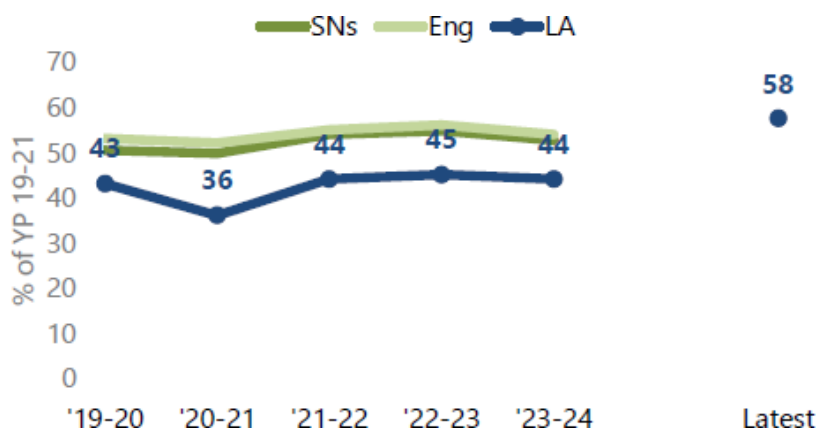
**Rate of CLA ceased per 10,000 children**



**Leaving care 2: Care leavers aged 17-18 who are in Education, Employment or Training (%)**



**Leaving care 4: Care leavers aged 19-21 who are in Education, Employment or Training (%)**





### Key Stage One Attainment

These assessments are no longer statutory, the virtual school headteacher will continue to track progress termly through the personal education plan.

### Key Stage Two Attainment

CLA 1yr+	2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024		2025	
% Expected	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat
KS2: RWM	39	35	32	37	42	N/A	44	N/A	33	32	44	36	24	34	18	35

### Key Stage Four Attainment

	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024		2025	
Measure CLA 1yr+	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat
% 9-5 English	16.7	16.0	12.2	(16.0)	11.8	(16.0)	20.7	20.0	14.3	18.0	6.8	17	18.8	(17)
% 9-4 English	33.3	27.0	24.4	(27.0)	29.4	(27.0)	37.9	31.0	38.1	28.0	20.5	25.0	31.3	(25.0)
% 9-5 Maths	10.0	11.0	9.8	(11.0)	5.9	(11.0)	13.8	26.0	4.8	13.0	13.6	13.0	25.0	(13.0)
% 9-4 Maths	20.0	24.0	17.1	(24.0)	26.5	(24.0)	31.0	26.0	14.3	26.0	22.7	24.0	34.4	(24.0)
% 9-4 (E&M)	16.7	18.0	12.2	(18.0)	14.7	(18.0)	24.1	22.0	11.9	20.0	11.4	18.0	18.8	(18.0)
% 9-5 (E&M)	6.7	7.0	4.9	(7.0)	5.9	(7.0)	10.3	11.0	2.4	10.0	2.3	9.0	15.6	(9.0)

Measure	Results	Additional Info
Education Attendance (under 16s) (all CLA)	91.5%	0.2% increase on previous year
School suspensions (under 16s) (all CLA)	14.7% average	1.2% decrease on previous year
Not in Employment, Education or Training (under 18s) (all CLA)	22.4%	Increase on previous year, snapshot based on end of academic year

