

Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy 2023-27 Action Plan – 2023-24 update

	Category/ service	Priorities	What needs to happen	Progress
1	In-house regulated placements	i Increase the number of foster families to meet demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of foster care support and benefits to support retention Programme of foster carer recruitment including succession planning as older foster carers retire Foster carer training package including digital offer and Caring2Learn (C2L) Recruitment of carers for particular groups of young people e.g. UASC, parent and child, teenagers with challenging behaviour Consistent, high quality support to foster carers by social workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The annual survey has been devised and sent out; this has remained open for 4 weeks collecting feedback around carers experiences of support and their experiences of fostering for LCC, and closes on 25th March 2024 – information will inform the retention strategy and any developments for the support offer, staff development and the wider children’s services practice. The DfE have undertaken a review of the recruitment and assessment practices and strategies in the service as part of a larger sample group of Local Authorities, providing a health check with the expectation of providing some advice and support around improving and developing current practice to improve performance. The annual survey has been used to collect participants intentions around how long they intend to foster for. Additional marketing advice and consultation has been accessed to review the marketing and advertising in the service to review the techniques and maximise productivity. The 2024/25 training offer is now fully accessible to be booked online for carers, although some carers still choose to book training through their SSW for a large majority this has been a welcomed development; automatic reminders and confirmations are sent which has reduced administration time.

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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Marketing Team are currently designing a marketing strategy as part of the 2024/25 plan which focuses on the services key areas of placement need. • Targeted audits and training for staff supports continued professional development with an emphasis on carer experience. • The annual survey has been used to capture the experience of the carer, asking them questions around the experiences of support from their supervising social worker. • Practice Workshops are arranged and taking place monthly, facilitated by the Advanced Practitioners, to support the ongoing personal and professional development of staff; the Advanced Practitioners used themes picked up to organise areas for improvement according to feedback, placement disruptions, reasons for resignations etc. • Work with Commissioning colleagues to block commission placements in the Lincolnshire area to ensure placement choice. • Fosterlink Service diagnostic tests and site visit to explore the strengths and areas for development within Fostering Marketing and Recruitment to support the service in recruitment and retaining fostering families to care for Lincolnshire children; any recommendations to be shared with service and implemented accordingly.
		ii	Information sharing across teams to support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop information sharing protocols between service areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing development work and attendance at team meetings to ensure social care and SEND

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		<p>placement planning is effective and reflects the needs of children and young people</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information shared at Placement Management Meeting (PMM) to support placement decisions Continue to support information sharing with in-house Foster Duty Desk and LCCPlacements 	<p>teams are aware of the commissioning process for independent placements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective relationships between Commissioning Officers, social workers and SEND caseworkers Clear protocols in place for search and placement approvals by the relevant service area including updated evaluation/approval document. PMM continues to review emerging placement needs and has enabled both social care and the Commissioning Team to consider matching best value and plan future placement moves to meet the needs of CYP. Strategic Placement Management Meeting (SPMM) considers higher level approaches to placements including internal capacity and developments, independent provider market development and emerging local trends that impact on demand. Foster Duty Desk are co-located near LCCPlacements which facilitates information sharing and supports prioritisation of foster care referrals. Regular cost demand trajectory analysis allows review of placement costs and facilitates budget planning. Children’s Services Ofsted inspection (April 2023) praised joint working between social care, SEND, CWD, health, Commissioning Team, the LSU and the independent placement provider about the bespoke package for a high-needs young person who is now thriving in their new residential school.

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		iii Capacity and occupancy of in-house residential homes is effective and meets CYP needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of CYP placed in-house to consider if a move to foster placements would be suitable (in-house or independent) • Review of in-house residential children's homes to ensure they meet the needs of our CiC cohort • Opening of two new residential children's homes in 2023 • Recruitment of high-quality staff including bank and relief staff to ensure workforce is flexible and has sufficient capacity • Monitor occupancy levels to ensure in-house placements are utilised effectively to maximise outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All children placed in-house have an appropriate trajectory for their needs; during 2023 2 children successfully moved into foster placements and 2 children returned to their families. • All children placed in in-house residential provision are reviewed at regular intervals at PMM. • Ongoing programme of improvement across in-house residential homes as part of LCC's transformation programme. • Residential recruitment programme has been revamped to attract high quality staff with regular combined and targeted recruitment campaigns and recent involvement in the regional recruitment campaign for the East Midlands area; salaries for RCO1 posts have been uplifted and training and development programme has been established to support progression based on training and competence rather than annual increments i.e. workers are able to move through to RCO2 at an expedited rate if they can complete the relevant training and demonstrate that they can meet the skills required for the role; continue to develop the extensive training programme and regularly add additional courses and bespoke training to meet the individual needs of the children in in-house residential homes. • Additional Service Lead appointed across Residential Estates; the Service Leads work closely with the Homes Managers and Ofsted to ensure continuous journey of improvement and striving for excellence across all of in-house residential homes.

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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Occupancy levels are closely managed to ensure that the needs of the children are prioritised and beds may be held vacant for short periods of time if required.
		iv Capacity within the secure estate is sufficient to meet CYP needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and renegotiate the Lincolnshire Secure Unit (LSU) contract with Ministry of Justice (MoJ) in 2026 Commence building the new 24-bed secure children's home Lincolnshire CYP are able to access in-county secure accommodation when needed CYP in secure estate are supported effectively to return to 'mainstream' placements CYP with Deprivation of Liberty orders (DoLS) are accommodated in safe and suitable placements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meetings have started with the Youth Custody Service (YSC) and NHS England (NHSE) on a new potential 7-year LSU contract to start in 2026. Enabling works have started for the new secure children's home and the main contract will be signed in June/July 2024; building work is expected to be completed by the end of 2026. In-county secure accommodation capacity varies as LSU currently has 1 welfare bed which, though it is a national MoJ resource, Lincolnshire has first option to use if it is vacant; the new LSU will have 16 welfare beds which will increase potential capacity for Lincolnshire secure placements. CYP in secure have detailed transition plans to return to mainstream placements or independence following the end of their secure order; LSU temporarily accommodated a young person with complex additional health and SEND needs following the end of one placement and their permanent placement being developed – this approach and the support by the LSU for the young person was praised by Ofsted. DoLS are used appropriately following application to the courts and Commissioning Team work with social care to identify the most appropriate placements to support the order(s).

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2	Independent regulated placements	i	<p>Independent regulated placements are effective and meet CYP needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual re-opening of the Open Select List to increase numbers of pre-approved suppliers • LCCPlacements team are well-resourced to support service areas with referrals and contract arrangements • Develop relationships with suppliers to negotiate block contracts and block commissioning arrangements, and enhance knowledge of vacancies and new local provision • Children's Services placement management oversight (in-house and independent) to seek to bring most Lincolnshire CYP back into Lincolnshire-based placements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Open Select List (OSL) was re-opened successfully in July 2023 with an increase in pre-approved suppliers across all 7 strands. • LCCPlacements team have increased resource with a new Senior Placement Support Officer to provide day-to-day operational oversight, review of processes and data management; interviews for additional Placement Support Officers have taken place and the team have been strengthened through establishment of permanent posts, along with additional capacity from Business Support. • As of 15th March 2024 the following proportion of independent placements were in Lincolnshire: 35.5% of residential, 42.9% foster care, 53.3% supported accommodation for 16-17 year olds, and 67.7% of Independent Non-Maintained Special Schools/INMS (inc 73.7% of all day placements). • The Relationship-Based Commissioning strand of the CiC Transformation Programme is focused on maximising placement capacity in Lincolnshire for Lincolnshire CYP and working with good, local independent placement providers to develop services that meets the Lincolnshire need, ensuring the growth is in line with the Council's vision. • PMM and SPPM continue monitor existing external placements and work proactively to identify opportunities to bring Lincolnshire CYP back in to Lincolnshire.
		ii	<p>Independent regulated placements offer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable fee increases are agreed with suppliers through the regional panel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For independent placements in 2023/24, fee increases were agreed through the regional panel, using the SSDA-developed portal of evidence

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		<p>Value for Money (VfM)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full-cohort oversight of placements in line with the aims of the Children in Care (CiC) transformation programme • Review INMS placements with SEND team to ensure suitability and management of referrals, and look to develop a placements overview forum to consider placement demand, capacity and needs trends • Appropriate challenge to placement packages including support and cost reduction, and effective step-down or transition 	<p>submission, with an average 7% increase offered to independent residential children's home placements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lincolnshire's Children's Commissioning Team Manager has been appointed regional Chair of the fee increase panel, which is under development for 2024/25. Fee increase requests for 2024/25 are now closed and are currently being considered for the next financial year; requests will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis and initial offers will not exceed 4%. • SPMM and PMM continue to have oversight of in-house and independent placements. • PMM for SEND placements is in development with SEND service area and Commissioning Team to provide oversight of high numbers of INMS placements and improve value for money through block commissioning activity. • Commissioning Officers have worked closely with service areas to identify costs and reduce support/care packages where appropriate; demand for placements has increased in some areas such as INMS whilst residential care has noted an increase in complexity of need.
		<p>iii Placements for late entrants into care with complex behaviours deliver high outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing development of placement referral form to ensure young people are represented clearly and positively • Suppliers are upskilled in a range of de-escalation techniques and management of complex behaviours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placement referral form continues to be developed to reflect the needs of young people, service areas and providers; update to include supported accommodation Ofsted registration requirements; referral form includes the Valuing Care toolkit showing strengths/needs scaling. • Placement referral response evaluation form awards highest weighted score for in-county

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop effective step-down referral route into in-house supported accommodation and commissioned Youth Housing service 	<p>placements (along with cost and meeting needs of CYP); placement decision signed off by appropriate Head of Service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commissioning Officers work closely with service leads to sustain placement packages for complex young people; use of unregulated placements is closely monitored through clear protocols with AD oversight. PMM and supported accommodation review meetings identify young people who may be in scope of moving to NEST or Denton & Rowston, with placement planning meetings and transition arrangements to support an effective move; NEST intense needs service supports up to 4 solo placements and has been successful in managing some very complex young people, the majority of whom have successfully moved on to either multi-occupancy accommodation hubs, supported adult or fully independent accommodation.
		<p>iv Children with Disabilities (CWD) are supported to access appropriate SEND services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of supplier relationships to increase access to high-quality and effective SEND services Commissioning of CWD Support Services including Early Support and Learning Provision, Targeted Positive Activities, and Domiciliary Care Commissioning of Alternative Provision, Domiciliary Care and CWD Short Breaks through the Open Select List provides VfM Open Select List for SEND services re-opens annually to develop supplier numbers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commissioning Officers responsible for the oversight of INMS placements have divided providers into complex needs and SEMH categories to provide more focus on relationship develop in these key areas; effective relationships established with in-county INMS provision. The Commissioning Team has undertaken procurements in 2023/24 for CWD Support Services and East Midlands regional SEND mediation, and is currently undertaking a service review on the Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) service, with a review of Physical Disability (PD) Outreach contract due to start in 2024

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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LCC Placements work with service areas to identify placements offering best value and outcomes. The Open Select List (OSL) was re-opened successfully in July 2023 with an increase in pre-approved suppliers across all 7 strands, including the 3 SEND/CWD strands. New strands for regulated Alternative Provision and Online Education are in development and will join the OSL re-opening in 2024.
3	Supported accommodation	i	Numbers of young people in Supported Accommodation are low <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commissioned Youth Housing contract continues to deliver VfM and high outcomes through their intensive support placements Young people are accommodated in-house where appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth Housing contract (NEST) with Nacro has been extended for the final 2 years available until December 2025. Children's Commissioning is in the early stages of the service review which will start to move through the democratic decision making process from early autumn 2024. NEST offers up to 72 spaces over 3 locations and in a variety of settings from multi-occupancy 24/7 hubs to single intense needs accommodation. As of 15th March 2024, NEST had 88.9% occupancy (inc pending); 25% of occupied spaces were by CiC and 26.5 by care leavers. LCC Winter Household Support Fund 2023 distributed to NEST residents to support with utility bills etc. NEST are one of the partners in the DfE-funded Staying Close Staying Connected project, utilising their experience with independent housing providers to support CiC and care leavers sustain tenancies and access housing out of county as well as provide floating support.

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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-house supported accommodation at Denton & Rowston is at 90% occupancy as of 15th March 2024 with one referral pending. As of 15th March 2024 there are 15 Independent supported accommodation placements, 53.3% of which are in Lincolnshire and 33.3% in adjacent LAs; the remaining 13.3% are out of county due to location of their personal networks.
		ii Care leavers and young people aged 16-17 at risk of homelessness are supported to access suitable accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective contract management and appropriate challenge to supported accommodation suppliers to are effective in reducing placement packages Deliver a well-resourced Youth Housing service Review existing commissioned Youth Housing service to determine delivery from January 2026 Young people are supported to access education, employment or training (EET) to increase future opportunities and independence Joined-up access to move-on options e.g. adult accommodation, Intense Housing Management (IHM) accommodation, specialist accommodation Maintain and develop links with District Councils and other housing suppliers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commissioning Officer oversight ensures links between NEST and supported accommodation (inc in-house provision) to ensure CYP are accommodated appropriately; appropriate challenge to accommodation providers regarding placement fees and support packages to obtain best value. Placement review meetings are held with service area, Commissioning Team and social care every 6 weeks to review support packages and identify where young people are ready for their next steps including Adult services, independent tenancy, Nacro Step Forward accommodation and/or applications to social housing. DLUHC-funded care leaver homelessness prevention project is ongoing and has added value by supporting care leavers to access suitable accommodation. Local Connection to all of Lincolnshire is established for Lincolnshire care leavers in agreement with all 7 District Councils, who have also agreed for Council Tax exemption for care leavers from April 2024.

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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DfE Staying Close Staying Connected grant has enabled LCC and partners to develop a range of support to CiC and care leavers in residential/supported accommodation including mental health and substance use support, education employment and training (EET) and personal network connectivity to support sustained accommodation and tenancies; the funding is in place until March 2025 and may be extended by DfE, subject to evaluation.
		iii Supported accommodation suppliers are registered with OFSTED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported accommodation suppliers register with OFSTED in good time to ensure placements are made in line with regulations • In-house supported accommodation is registered with OFSTED • Supported accommodation contract is reviewed to ensure new regulations are reflected in our service specification and Terms and Conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations came into force in 2023; all key or most-used Lincolnshire supported accommodation providers submitted a compliant registration application to Ofsted by the deadline of 27th October 2023 – this includes NEST (youth housing), Barnardo’s Supported Lodgings, UASC, and in-house (Denton & Rowston). • Ofsted inspections will start from September 2024, and guidance has been shared with the supported accommodation sector. • Supported Accommodation service specification and terms and conditions were reviewed in advance of the 2023 re-opening of the OSL and will be reviewed again before the 2024 re-opening. • Contract assurance self-assessment and referral form fields have been updated to ensure independent supported accommodation placements are only made with Ofsted-registered providers. • Commissioning Officers continue to develop knowledge to support providers and internal

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				process development through attendance and engagement with NCB supported accommodation communities or practice and learning events.	
4	Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)	i	UASC are placed in high quality, culturally appropriate placements that meet their specific support needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UASC Closed Ordered List (COL) and the Open Select List (OSL) continue to deliver capacity and timely response to UASC arrivals • Other suppliers are upskilled to be able to offer support to UASC • UASC are supported to access EET soon after they become CiC • Targeted use of Home Office Annex A grant to support service capacity • Ongoing development of in-house, commissioned and community support to the UASC cohort 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UASC COL is in place until September 2025 plus 2 years potential extension; 4 providers were awarded ranked places on the list and all 4 providers now have Lincolnshire placements; no new providers can be admitted to the list and all 4 are out of Lincolnshire, though in directly adjacent LAs; no Lincolnshire providers applied who met the quality standards required. • UASC numbers have continued to rise due to the mandatory National Transfer Scheme (NTS) referring young people to LAs from Kent and the south coast; Lincolnshire has accepted 41 NTS referrals since 1st April 2023, including 10 U16s. • There are currently 18 UASC in foster care placements, all of whom are out of county; placements are in multi-cultural areas such as London, Leicester and Birmingham. • East Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (EMSMP) is reviewing foster care development support in the region following the success of the UASC-focused 'Place to Call Home' project. • UASC currently make up 10.9% of all Lincolnshire CiC. • UASC are supported into formal education or college as quickly as possible once accommodated; depending on the date of arrival, September start may be difficult so UASC access informal EET and ESOL support, supported by Virtual School pupil premium funding.

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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UASC are well supported by social workers and their supported accommodation providers to gain independent living skills, understand life in the UK, and apply for leave to remain. • Additional capacity has been created by a 12-month age assessment unit in Gainsborough which supports same-day accommodation in the event social care accept young person's claim of age as being U18 or need to undertake an age assessment; this predominantly supports young people from the east coast adult asylum hotels who claim to be U18 and is contingency for the same issue if/when RAF Scampton become operational. • In response to increased numbers of UASC, Home Office Annex A grant funding has been used to re-base the social care budget for CiC South and has been used to increase social worker capacity. • NEST, Supported Lodgings, Denton & Rowston and independent supported accommodation have all accommodated UASC; support provided by specialist social care teams as well as resources and training courses.
		ii Former-UASC care leavers are supported effectively and are accommodated in high quality suitable accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective links with the Home Office and legal representatives result in timely asylum decisions • Former-UASC care leavers are supported to remain in EET whilst they await their asylum claim outcome • Maintain and develop suitable accommodation options for former-UASC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former-UASC care leavers (18+ year olds) make up c.25% of the wider care leaver cohort and are expected to account for 30% by April 2025. • Positive Home Office decisions are increasingly coming through in good time, providing young people the opportunity to move on to independent accommodation and take up employment; Lincolnshire is currently supporting

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			<p>care leavers awaiting a decision on their asylum claim</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish clear and affordable move-on options for the cohort 	<p>no Appeal Rights Exhausted (ARE) former-UASC care leavers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The majority of former-UASC care leavers remain in EET whilst they are awaiting a Home Office decision, with approximately 68% of 18+ year olds in education (compared to 48% of the wider care leaver cohort). UASC COL provides for former-UASC care leavers to remain in their accommodation at a reduced rate until they receive a decision from the Home Office, with support provided by LLCS; LLCS continue to work with local housing providers to identify move-on options, including return to Lincolnshire (NEST, supported lodgings etc). Home Office Annex A grant funding has been used to increase capacity within LLCS to support the growing former-UASC care leaver cohort.
5	Care leavers	i	<p>Deliver an effective and appropriately resourced Leaving Care Service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review existing commissioned Lincolnshire Leaving Care Service to determine delivery from April 2025 Consistently high numbers of care leavers in suitable and safe accommodation Care leavers are supported to access education, employment or training (EET) to increase future opportunities and independence Work with local and regional partners to embed care leaver local connection entitlement Supported Lodgings are developed and supported 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ofsted inspection of Children's Services in April 2023 rated the new standalone category on <i>'The experience and progress of care leavers'</i> as 'Good' and Children's Services overall as 'Outstanding'. LLCS management capacity has been increased post-Ofsted along with Leaving Care Worker pay to support recruitment and retention of quality staff. Commissioning Team commenced service review of LLCS in summer 2023; recommendations for future delivery going through democratic process with decision expected by June 2024. Children's Services Feb-24 ChAT shows that 93% of 19-21 year old care leavers are in suitable accommodation.

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted use of Rent Gap agreements to support care leavers experiencing short-term financial difficulties • District Councils offering priority for housing for care leavers including Council Tax relief • Ongoing development of the Care Leaver Local Offer and social media communications/platforms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children’s Services Feb-24 ChAT shows that 48% of 19-21 year old care leavers are in EET; LLCS are undertaking a revision of the EET survey they carried out in 2021 into causes of EET and wider determinants of non-engagement such as mental health issues. • Local Connection agreed for Lincolnshire care leavers across all 7 District Councils; East Midlands care leaver manager leads have committed to exploring regional Local Connection; DLUHC are consulting on reforms to social housing allocations and have referenced the Government’s intention to remove Local Connection test nationally for care leavers. • Supported Lodgings are Ofsted-registered and provide accommodation for 18+ year old care leavers, though they also offer assessment beds for U18s pending a permanent placement; 20 Supported Lodgings providers offer up to 23 placements including short-term respite provision. • Head of Service for Leaving Care and Supported Living has agreed a small number of rent gap payments requested via LLCS to support care leavers for short period of time to cover the support element of their housing costs. • LLCS continue to add value to care leavers through donations (food, money etc) and through delegated CiC budget for care leaver expenses including New Homes Grant payments; LCC Winter Household Support Fund 2023 distributed to care leavers to support with utility bills etc.

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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CiC and Leaving Care Steering Group meet bi-monthly to review health inequalities including UASC and former-UASC care leavers. • Accommodation pathways established with District Councils; Council Tax benefit for all care leavers in Lincolnshire in place by April 2024 along with free prescriptions. • Ongoing development of the Care Leaver Local Offer; LLCS participation worker has developed a number of focus groups to look at specific aspects of service delivery; Barnardo's have commissioned an engagement platform that will support rapid communications to care leavers inc messages, emails and newsletters; FAB! Awards 2023 was held in May 2023 and nominations for the 2024 awards close in the middle of April.
		<p>ii Care leavers are well equipped for independence by the age of 21 as they step down from full service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leavers have the resources and skills to manage their own accommodation needs, have good mental health, have supportive networks and relationships and are financially secure • Develop mechanisms to enable care leavers to remain close to, or in contact with, networks and areas of their choosing • Links with other LAs re: Local Connection and reciprocal support for care leavers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ofsted inspection in April 2023 highlighted gaps in the 21+ service offer to care leavers, namely around allocated named worker and keeping in touch; this has been included in the CiC Transformation Plan and is one of the key areas of improvement work; Mosaic has been updated to record 21+ visits and all 21+ care leavers have been allocated to a named Team Manager if they are not already open to a Leaving Care Worker. • Processes have been updated and tightened to ensure that, prior to stepping forward, every young person has a revised pathway assessment to ensure they are ready for a less intensive service. • LLCS are one of the partners in the DfE-funded Staying Close Staying Connected project, offering

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				<p>wellbeing and additional EET support as well as Connective Workers to support CiC resident out of county to identify their key networks and where they want to live when they leave care, including exploring a return to Lincolnshire.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Connection agreed for Lincolnshire care leavers across all 7 District Councils; East Midlands care leaver manager leads have committed to exploring regional Local Connection; DLUHC are consulting on reforms to social housing allocations and have referenced the Government’s intention to remove Local Connection test nationally for care leavers.

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