



Westmorland
& Furness
Council

westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk

Cared for Children and Care Experienced Young People's Strategy



Vision

For our cared for and care experienced children and young people to be safe, happy, and healthy, to enjoy life and realise their potential.

A message from our Promise Ambassadors

We want this strategy to be your guide to making sure we receive our promise.



A message from our Care Experienced Ambassador

Being a looked after child and moving on into independence can be a tough journey, it is essential to have that support and stability. This strategy is built with the young person in mind, it's a drive that brings everyone together, it's a promise. Reading this strategy brings me hope for the future, that these young people are in safe hands with people who are committed through and through into delivering the promise to you.



A message from Sue Sanderson, Cabinet Member, Children's Services, Education and Skills

Our vision emphasises our commitment to a service dedicated to meeting the needs of children, young people, and families, to ensure they experience the best that life has to offer.

Our leadership commitment drives us to consistently challenge ourselves, aiming for continuous improvement in the quality and effectiveness of our services to enhance safety and well-being for children, young people, and their families.

Our goal is to deliver outstanding services, recognising that some families require additional support to stay together. However, if staying at home is not possible, we will provide the care, support, and stability that children deserve.

As corporate parents, we are dedicated to offering the highest quality care and support to our cared for children and care experienced young people/adults. We understand the significance of stable homes in ensuring their happiness, health, and the best possible outcomes.

Taking an active approach to our corporate parenting responsibilities, we actively listen to the voices of our cared for children and care experienced young people/adults, collaborating closely with our partners. Collaborating with our partners is essential to delivering our strategy. 'Partnership' stands as a cornerstone in our strategy implementation through the development of a Cared for Children Partnership Board we will broaden the reach and effectiveness and strengthen our capacity to deliver outstanding services.

This strategy outlines our ambitions until 2028 and details the actions the council and its partners must take to facilitate continuous improvement for the children in our care and those that have left our care.



Councillor Sue Sanderson
Cabinet Member for Children's
Services, Education and Skills



A message from Milorad Vasic, Director of Children's Services

As the Director of Children Services, it is my great pleasure to present this Cared for Children and Care Experienced Young People's Strategy, that underscores our unwavering commitment to the well-being, growth, and future success of every child or young person in our care or who has experienced care.

The journey of a cared for child is a unique and often challenging one, shaped by a variety of factors that demand our collective attention, empathy, and action. In recognising this, our strategy is built upon the principles of compassion, empowerment, and partnership. It is a testament to our dedication to providing the highest standards of care and support to each child, irrespective of their circumstances. In the pages that follow, you will find a strategic roadmap that addresses the holistic needs of cared for children and for those who have care experience, encompassing not only their immediate welfare but also their long-term development. We aim to create an environment where every child feels valued, heard, and empowered to reach their full potential.

This strategy is not just a document, it is a pledge to our children. It reflects our determination to collaborate with families, communities, and all stakeholders involved in the care of these remarkable young individuals. Together, we will build a foundation that nurtures resilience, promotes education, and fosters a sense of belonging.

As we embark on this journey, I extend my deepest gratitude to all the dedicated professionals, foster families, and partners who contribute to the realisation of our vision. Your commitment to the well-being of our children is the cornerstone of our success.

I invite you to embrace this strategy with an open heart and a shared sense of responsibility. Let us work hand in hand in making a difference, creating a brighter, more promising future for every child and young person.



Milorad Vasic
Director of Children's Services



Co-producing our strategy

Our cared for children strategy has been collaboratively crafted with input from our dedicated Promise Ambassadors who are members of our children in care council. We deeply appreciate the thoughtful reflection they have devoted to bringing this strategy to fruition. It is inspiring to witness how our young ambassadors aspire to support fellow individuals navigating the care system aiming to enhance their overall experiences.

Recognising that actions speak louder than words we acknowledge the importance of demonstrating tangible results, therefore moving forward the Promise Ambassadors will actively participate in shaping our delivery plans.

The collective voices of children and young people coupled with insights from our Corporate Parenting Board will serve as crucial benchmarks holding us accountable to the commitments we have made.

Our approach

Our approach is that it is imperative for every child to have the best. Our goal is for them to grow up in a happy, loving, and caring home. We will always seek to keep children and young people within their family networks, doing all that we can to enable families to stay together. In some situations, we take the difficult decision to place a child in our care. When that does happen, we take a strengths-based approach focussing on identifying the strengths, or assets, as well as the needs and difficulties of children, young people, and families. Whilst in our care, we prioritise maintaining relationships with their families and friends, working towards safe and timely reunification.

Our child-centred practice helps us to assemble the evidence base about the child's lived experiences, especially the impact on the child of any adverse childhood experiences. We take a strengths-based, solution focused approach to our work, and support the family and network to come up with their own solutions.

Collaboration with statutory and other partners is integral to our approach. Through working closely with others, we can create an effective supportive system for children and families.

Our Promise

Each of our priorities relates to Our Promise which was designed by young people. The guiding thread woven into all our priorities and aspirations for cared for children and care experienced young people is centred on the voice of the child and their active participation in ensuring our effective purposeful actions make a difference.

To ensure that we bring this to life we will ...

- Incorporate mechanisms for open communication, actively seeking and valuing the perspectives of children.
- Create spaces where they feel heard, respected, and encouraged to express their thoughts, feelings, and ideas.
- Ensure decisions affecting them are made collaboratively, promoting a sense of ownership and agency in their own development.

Our two guiding principles

Incorporating the guiding principles of relationships and inclusivity into our strategy gives us a shared foundation. 'Relationships' emphasises the importance of nurturing meaningful connections and 'inclusivity' underscores the commitment to embracing diversity, ensuring that voices are heard. Together these principles contribute to a strategy that prioritises meaningful relationships, diversity, and a sense of belonging.

Relationships

The strategy document 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' was clear on the importance of providing cared for children with stable, loving homes close to their communities. To achieve this, Westmorland and Furness Council must prioritise loving and safe relationships for children alongside being a world-class corporate parent.

In our compassionate strategy for cared for and care experienced children and young people, a foundational principle, centres around the importance of meaningful relationships. Acknowledging that children need to feel loved, we will prioritise the development of strong connections as an essential principle. This commitment extends to creating an environment where cared for children not only feel loved but also have the opportunity to develop a robust sense of self.

Additionally, understanding and embracing their life stories is woven into the fabric of our care, ensuring that each child's journey is acknowledged, respected, and supported with empathy.

Inclusivity

Our second key principle revolves around inclusive practice, emphasising the importance of inclusivity in our approach. This principle extends to creating a nurturing environment that embraces the diversity of vulnerable children, including those with disabilities and those who identify as LGBTQ. Central to our inclusive care is the acknowledgment and respect for cultural identity, creating an atmosphere where every child feels valued and affirmed for who they are. This commitment ensures that our care is sensitive to the unique needs and backgrounds of each child under our support.



Our Five Priorities

**Steps to
Independence**

**Relationships
with Carers and
Families**

**Health and
Emotional
Wellbeing**

**Education,
Employment
and Training**

**Home - Stability
and Security**

Home - Stability and Security

Stability and consistency in good homes is paramount for children and young people to feel safe, loved and cared for. If children do have to move homes, then it is important that children know why this is happening, that moves are planned, and where possible there should be time built into the plan so that children get to know their new home and carers.

A stable family home provides a sense of belonging and permanence. It contributes to a strong identity and connection to our communities.

To deliver on this priority we will ...

- Focus on ensuring stable and secure family homes to provide a sense of continuity, security, and safety.
- Regularly evaluate our practice to minimise disruptions and enhance the overall stability of home.
- Implement trauma-informed care approaches to address past experiences and support emotional well-being.

'Because I think every home needs love'

Promise Ambassador



Education, Employment and Training

Championed by our Virtual School, children and young people will be supported and encouraged to become successful independent adults who enjoy learning and are aspirational for their future. Education empowers children and young people; providing them with the foundation to achieve their academic and broader aspirations. Our strategy aims to support cared for children and care experienced young people to develop the confidence and self-belief to achieve their ambition.

To deliver on this priority we will ...

- Secure access to and attendance at high quality local provision from the early years through to post sixteen
- Identify, assess, and provide the required support to meet children and young people's needs.
- Ensure support is in place to remove the barriers that impact on attendance including accessing the curriculum
- Work with educational providers to develop a supportive learning environment and with social workers to produce Personal Educational Plans (PEPS) which promote the educational achievement of cared for children
- Ensure these plans contain SMART Targets that are aspirational using Pupil Premium Plus to support their achievement.
- Celebrate achievements of progress made in education.



Health and Emotional Well-being

Being healthy is the foundation to a child's physical, mental health and wellbeing and significantly contributes to their overall quality of life. Early intervention and preventative health measures can mitigate the risks of long-term health issues.

We know that a child's experiences and environment impact on their physical and emotional wellbeing. Children with care experience are more likely to experience health risk factors such as past trauma, loss, poor self-esteem, and adverse experience. Children with strong emotional foundations are better equipped to build and maintain healthy connections and relationships.

Prioritising children's health and emotional wellbeing will help them to develop resilience, enabling them to cope better with life's challenges and setbacks.

To deliver on this priority we will ...

- Prioritise mental health support services to address the specific emotional health needs of our cared for and care experienced children, providing counselling services and resources for emotional resilience.
- Implement trauma informed care practices across the children's health and social care workforce to promote healing and resilience.
- Involve children and young people in healthcare decisions, so that their voices can inform service delivery.
- Continue to demonstrate compliance with statutory requirements to support positive emotional health and well-being of our cared for and care experienced children.
- Encourage and facilitate opportunities for physical activity and recreation. This could be sports, outdoor activities, active play, arts, and cultural activities.
- Foster emotional resilience, and support healthy relationships with caregivers, peers, and mentors

'People don't understand when I'm angry I will stay angry. So, leave me. Don't shout.'

A young person





Relationships with Carers and Families

Prioritising relationships with carers and families is essential for creating a comprehensive and supportive care system that nurtures the well-being, development, and success of cared for children. Building strong relationships with carers and families establishes a foundation for enduring connections, even as children transition into adulthood, providing ongoing support.

To deliver on this priority we will ...

- Enable strong relationships with foster families, ensuring they receive appropriate training and support.
- Facilitate communication and collaboration between birth families and caregivers when it is in the child's best interest.
- Support brothers and sisters to stay in touch and build strong relationships if they cannot live together in the same home.
- Promote open and transparent communication channels ensuring that families and carers feel heard and valued in decisions about their child.

Steps to independence

Empowering care experienced young adults on their journey to independence means guiding them towards becoming not only successful and happy adults but also nurturing confidence in their professional endeavours and potential parenting roles. At the age of 18, when young people transition out of care, they often face feelings of solitude, isolation, and financial uncertainty as they embark on the path to independent living. The financial strain posed by housing costs further complicates their journey to self-sufficiency. Addressing the vital issue of housing becomes a collaborative effort.

In recognising these challenges and understanding the obstacles that care experienced young adults often face, our heartfelt ambition is to develop a strategy that alleviates these challenges, nurturing an environment where they can navigate their path without facing these difficulties.

Our approach is rooted in empathy and support, aiming to create an environment where care experienced young adults can not only overcome obstacles but also thrive, finding fulfilment and success on their unique paths to independence.

To deliver on this priority we will ...

- Ensure that care experienced young adults are equipped with practical life skills, including financial literacy, decision-making, and problem-solving.
- Provide opportunities for vocational training and career guidance.
- Have a Local Offer that is accessible and comprehensive.
- Develop a coherent pathway to apprenticeships and employment opportunities where care experienced young people feel supported.



Our Seven Outcomes

Our outcomes will be how we measure success. They have evolved through a process of collaboration, aligning closely with what matters to children, young people, their carers, families, and professionals across the partnerships. These outcomes, tied to our five priorities guide our actions, which are detailed in a live Delivery Plan will be regularly reviewed by the Cared for Children Partnership Board.

The gap in achievement for cared for children and young people will be narrowed and increasingly be in line with their peers and better than national cared for children and young people

Care experienced young people feel cared for, safe, settled, connected, and supported in transitioning to adulthood.

Care experienced young people have a smooth transition into interdependence and living in their own homes by being equipped with essential life skills and a sense of self-efficacy.

Children and young people will experience a more enriched and supportive environment, leading to enhanced personal development, improved self-esteem, and a greater sense of purpose.

When children need to be cared for, plans for permanence are achieved quickly, and fully involve children, families, and carers.

Children and young people have long lasting healthy relationships with caregivers, peers, and support networks, contributing to a strong sense of belonging.

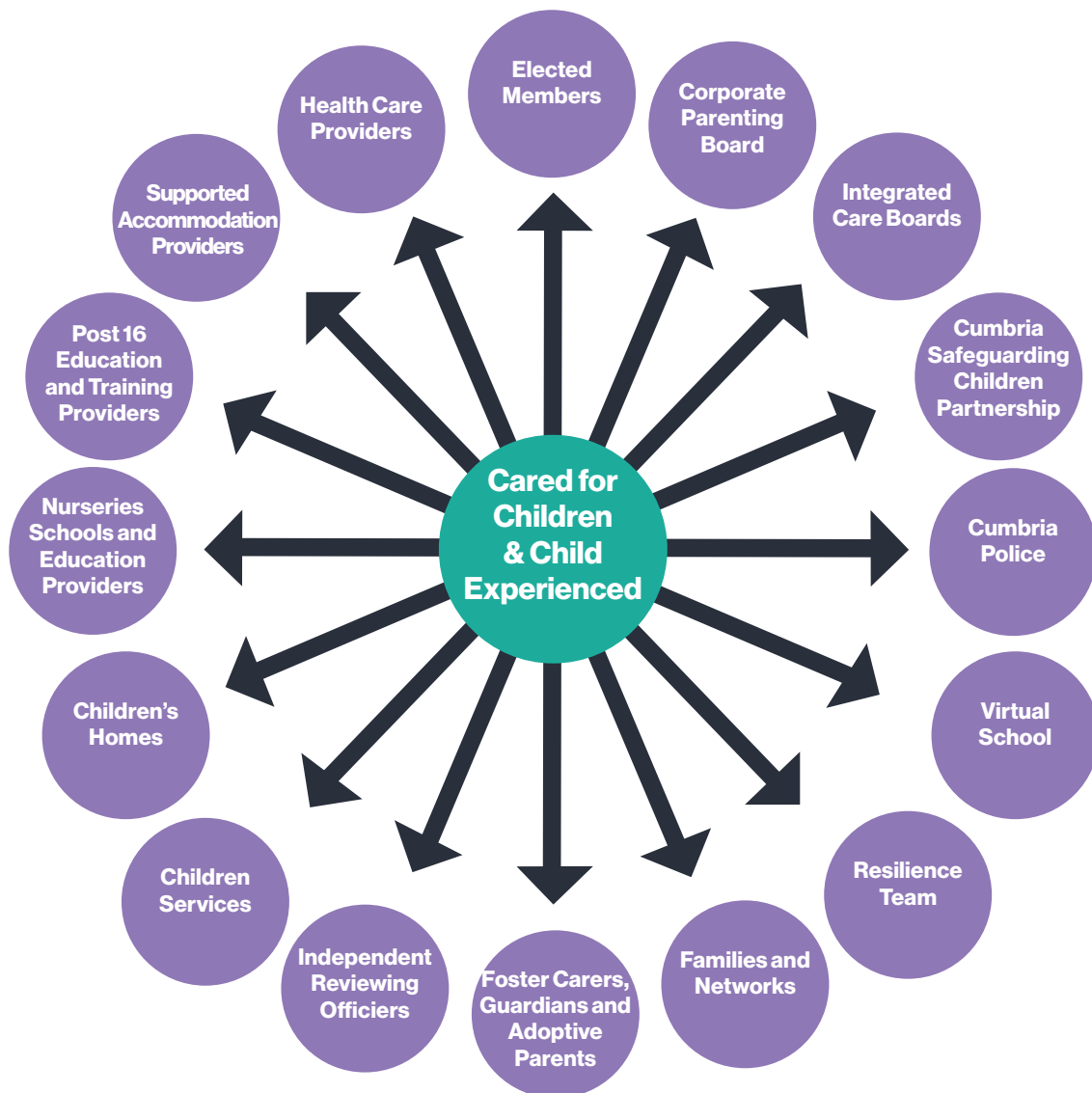
Children and young people experience improved emotional and physical health and well-being, developing a positive self-image and resilience.



A Partnership Strategy

Our strategy revolves around a collaborative effort with partners from the public, private, and third sectors. Together, we are committed to providing the highest standard of care and support for our children and young people. The synergy with our partners is crucial for achieving positive outcomes and delivering effective services tailored to the unique needs of cared for children and care experience young people.

Our partners understand their roles, working alongside us to ensure the health, well-being, and support of each child we are responsible for. As a partnership, we can provide a whole system approach to children's needs.



Corporate Parenting



All children deserve to be cared for, respected, listened to, supported, feel safe and loved. Our cared for children and care experienced young people are no different. However, without a stable family to support them, and often having experienced trauma, they face more challenges in achieving their aspirations.

As Corporate Parents it is our responsibility to care for them. This responsibility is not just with social workers and professionals who work directly with children and young people, but with all Westmorland and Furness staff, elected Members, and partners. We want everyone to read this strategy and ask themselves: “What can I do in my role to help children and young people that are cared for or have a care experience?”

‘Corporate Parenting’ is the term that is used to describe the responsibilities that a local authority or council has when a child or young person can no longer be looked after by their parent(s) or family. A Court will have decided that it is in a child’s best interest for this to happen. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 states that a Local Authority is the Corporate Parent of cared for and care experienced children and young people. It should act in the best interests of these children and young people; keeping them safe; promoting their physical and mental wellbeing, encouraging them to express their views, wishes and feelings. It should make sure that they live in stable homes, have consistent education or training, and healthy relationships. It should have high aspirations for children and help them prepare for adulthood and independent living.

Statutory Guidance to the Act (2018) states that the role that councils play in looking after children is one of the most important things they do.

The Children Act 2004 places a duty on the local authority and its partners (including the NHS England and any Integrated Care Board for that local authority area, the police, probation, and education) to co-operate with a view to making arrangements to improve the well-being of children in their area.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 set out seven corporate parenting principles to which councils should have regard in exercising their responsibilities to cared for and care experienced children and young people.

To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people.

To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.

To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.

To help those children and young people gain access to, and make best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.

To help those children and young people gain access to, and make best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.

For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.

To prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living

About the children in our care and care experienced

Data from the ChAT 27-02-2024:

250
Cared For Children
(CFC)
Of which:



62%
Males



60%
in Foster Placements

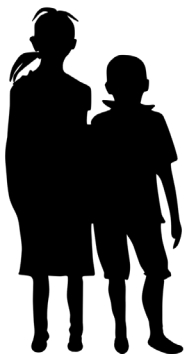
12%
with a disability



6%
3+ placements in a
year



70%
in placements for 2+ years
(of those aged under 16
who have been looked
after for 2½ years or more)



44 of 289 (15%)

CFC had a missing incident in the
last 12 months

8%
UASC (Unaccompanied
Asylum Seeking
Children)

270
Total missing incidents
for all CFC last 12
months

12% BAME
(including UASC, 5%
excluding UASC)

180
Care Experienced
(Relevant, Former
Relevant & Qualifying)
Of which:

57%
Males



4%
UASC (Unaccompanied
Asylum Seeking
Children)

19%
with a disability



43%
in education,
employment or training
(EET)



Support for Carers



Our foster carers play an invaluable role in the lives of the children in their care, providing them with loving, stable homes and the support which can help to transform a child's life.

In recognition of this crucial role Cumbria Fostering are committed to providing all our foster carers with high quality training and development opportunities to make sure that the outcomes for the children in their care are the best they can be regularly reviewing our carers' support needs, progress, and achievements every year.

This includes the initial Skills to Foster training undertaken as part of our foster carer preparation, as well as 21 hours of mandatory training each year, and advanced training courses such as Fostering Changes for our specialist and experienced carers.

As well as a wealth of training our comprehensive support package includes:

- A dedicated supervising social worker who will be there to support and advise, as well as support from our experienced foster carers through our peer mentoring scheme.
- Regular, local support groups enable foster carers to share experiences, knowledge and extend their support network. Our support groups produce their own newsletter which will keep carers up to date with developments in the world of fostering.
- An out of hour's duty service for emergency issues outside of standard office hours.
- Emotional Wellbeing Practitioners managed by Cumbria Fostering to offer support and advice to foster carers and children if they are struggling.
- Social activities for carers and their children, including a Summer 'Walk and Talk' event and a Christmas party.
- Annual Long Service Awards which recognise the amazing contribution of our carers with awards for those who have completed between five to more than 30 years of service.
- Foster carers are offered the opportunity to contribute to and shape the policy of our service; through joining our Steering Group, Corporate Parenting Board and Virtual School Governance Board.
- Our Fostering Friendly Employer scheme was launched in 2014 to encourage local businesses to be supportive and flexible employers, enabling foster carers to balance their work and caring responsibilities.
- Cumbria Fostering pays for our carers to be members of the Fostering Network - an independent agency which provides advice, support, and advocacy to foster carers.

As part of 'Cumbria's biggest family,' we make sure that our foster carers are fully prepared and supported to meet the needs of different children. Our foster carers Chris and Heather, from Barrow, said: "After a year of fostering with an independent agency and feeling unsupported we moved over to foster with the council. We now feel part of a 'family,' we can go to meetings with other local foster carers, share our experiences with each other and there are more people to listen to us. We regularly meet with other foster carers in town for a chat and there are get-togethers for the kids at Christmas and in the summer. You get a lot of support, which is essential."



Kinship Care

A Kinship carer is any friend or family member, who is not a child's parent but raising them for a significant amount of the time, either as a temporary or permanent arrangement. Kinship care will be the first consideration for any child who cannot live safely at home with their parents. If a suitable kinship carer can be found, they will receive help to step into this role. This support will be ongoing and flexible. It will suit the needs of the family depending on their personal circumstances, the age of the child, the child's experiences of trauma and adversity before coming into kinship care and the relationship with the parents. Children in kinship care will live without stigma and with a sense of love, belonging and stability throughout their childhood.



Governance

Working with partners under the Children Act 2004, local authorities have a duty to promote cooperation between 'relevant partners', including the police, the NHS and education providers, while those partners have a duty to cooperate with the local authority in turn. Guidance on the Act highlights that corporate parenting is a 'task [that] must be shared by the whole local authority and partner agencies. The Corporate Parent Board requires partner agencies to be accountable for the delivery of the priorities alongside the council.

The NHS has a significant role in ensuring the timely and effective delivery of health services to children in care as part of their statutory responsibilities. The NHS Constitution for England make clear the responsibilities of NHS Integrated Care Boards and NHS England to cared for children and care experienced young people. The government's response to the UK Care Review 'Stable Homes, built on love' consultation, published in September 2023, outlines that strengthened corporate parenting responsibilities will also be extended to relevant public bodies which incorporates Integrated Care Boards within the next 18 months.

Cared For Children Partnership Board

We need to collaborate as a partnership to address challenges collectively, we will aim to involve new partners and community groups for innovative solutions. It is crucial to acknowledge and celebrate the successes and strengths of our organisations, the partnership and the children and young people in our care. With our new collaborative Cared for Children Partnership approach we are committed to offering a more seamless and caring experience for the children and young people in our care.

Children & Young People's Voice

Corporate Parenting Board

Multi agency Cared for Children Partnership

Participation
(workstream)

Ambitions
Group
(workstream)

Care
Experienced
Partnership
(workstream)

Be Healthy
(workstream)



Delivering Our Strategy

Delivery of the strategy will sit with the Cared for Children Partnership Board; the Assistant Director for Childrens Services will report back regularly to the Corporate Parenting Board. The impact of the work will be measured by key indicators presented as part of the board's performance report.

The CiCC's and the Care Experienced forums form part of the core membership of the Board and drive the agenda, ensuring that children and young people receive feedback from partners and officers of the council.



References

The Children's Social Care National Framework will set direction for multiagency practice to improve outcomes and emphasise the importance of family networks and kinship carers in supporting children and young people. **Children's social care: national framework - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)**

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 will clarify to all organisations working with children and young people that family networks should be considered more often and thoroughly. **Working together to safeguard children - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)**

Any reference in the document to 'care experience' means any child or young person to whom W&F owes a legal duty as a 'looked after child' or 'care leaver', as defined in the Children Act 1989 and related legislation.



Westmorland
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Translation Services

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W celu uzyskania informacji w Państwa języku proszę
zatelefonować pod numer 0300 373 3300

Se quiser aceder a esta informação na sua língua,
telefone para o 0300 373 3300

Bu bilgiyi kendi dilinizde görmek istiyorsanız lütfen
0300 373 3300 numaralı telefonu arayınız

Together, we will make
Westmorland and Furness:
“A great place to live,
work and thrive”.

westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk

