

Children's Services

Education, Employment & Training Strategy for Care Experienced Young People

2025-27



**Working
for Children
and Families
in Solihull**



Solihull
METROPOLITAN
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Version control log		
Date	Name	Reason for update/amendment
May 2025	Tony McGregor	Development of draft document Version 1
September 2025	Tony McGregor	Document complete – final version
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Purpose of our strategy

Within Solihull, we want the very best for our children and young people and to support them to reach their potential.

Children and young people are central to all of our work as a Council and with our partner agencies and children's services continues to be the top priority for improvement.

Children and young people are key to the future of our borough, and we want Solihull to be a place where every child can thrive and reach their potential to become an independent, healthy and happy adult.

As a Council, we are committed to being good corporate parents to children in care and care experienced young people and we are embedding this into everything we do.

This strategy is aimed at supporting our cared for young people into suitable education, employment and training opportunities in line with their individual needs and at the earliest opportunity.

To achieve this, we need a whole system approach to address this and to ensure that this strategy is underpinned by hope and a willingness to work together collectively for young people within our borough.

We recognise that young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) face significant challenges in their lives.

Overview

This strategy is not just a document; it's a call to action for all stakeholders and partners in and across Solihull.

It is about us all working together—across Council services, with schools and education providers, colleges, employers, and the voluntary and third sector.

Our aim is to create a network of support for our young people to support the development of this strategy.

It's about recognising the role that each of us plays in shaping the future of our community.

We are particularly mindful of the most vulnerable young people in the Borough.

Those with special educational needs (SEN), care experienced young people, and those facing health challenges are at a higher risk of becoming NEET.

This strategy places a strong emphasis on identifying and supporting young people as early as possible within their education and employment journey, ensuring they have access to tailored interventions that meet their individual and unique needs.

The need for change

Care experienced young people are more likely to be NEET than the population average.

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care in 2022¹, commissioned by the last government, shows that young people aged 19-21 in England with experiences of the care system were three and a half times more likely than all other children to be NEET, with the latest figures indicating a NEET rate of 38 per cent. Only two per cent are undertaking an Apprenticeship.

Research from 2023, found that the vast majority of care leavers who are NEET were economically inactive, either due to disability, including mental health issues, or due to caring responsibilities.

A separate 2023 survey identified a lack of formal qualifications, housing and financial instability as additional barriers for Care Experienced young people.

Care experienced young people are approximately four times more likely to have a mental health disorder than children who grew up with their birth families.

Employability organisations cite mental health as the key obstacle to progressing into employment, education or training.

National and local agenda

The Get Britain Working White Paper was launched in November 2024, with the long-term aim of achieving an 80% employment rate for young people.

This included a Youth Guarantee: all 18-21 years in England have access to education, training or help to find a job or an Apprenticeship.

Solihull's allocation is £260k for April 2025 – March 2026 out of a WMCA pot of £5 million. Given the short-term nature of the funding, the aim of the interventions will be to provide young people with much needed work experience and the opportunity to develop essential workplace skills.

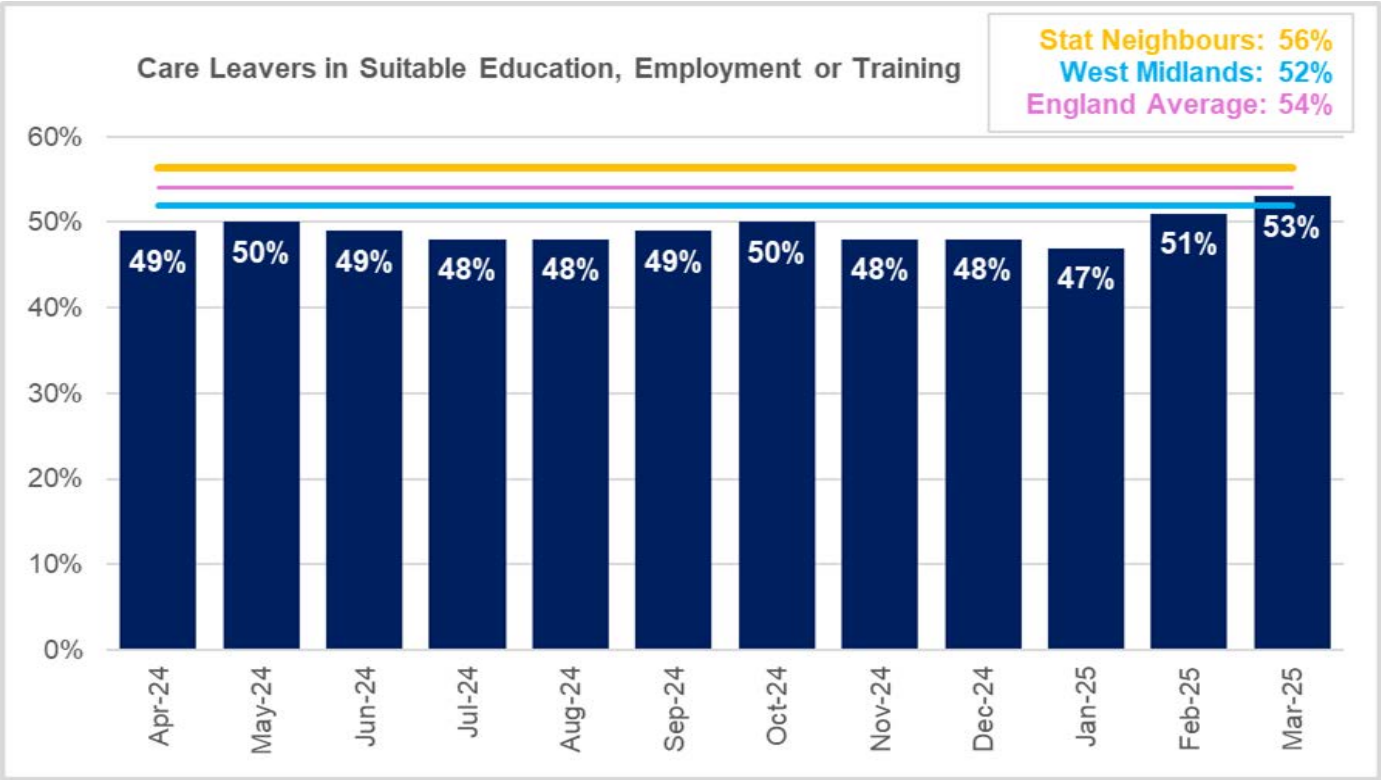
With a focus on clear leadership, accountability and proactive engagement to make sure no young person misses out. £110k of the total allocation will be spent on youth co-ordination activities – Local Authorities are encouraged to take a more proactive approach into improving connectivity between all local teams and organisations which support young people, including the Department for Works and Pensions, Job Centres, training providers and colleges, and Children and Adult services.

¹ [the-independent-review-of-childrens-social-care-final-report.pdf](#)

Overview of the local data- March 2025

- There were 588 care experienced young people in total in Solihull as of 31st March 2025 with 381 of these open to social care.
- Most of our care experienced young people are male (66%) of which 45% are white British and 17% are Asian (with 83% of the males in the ethnic category Asian being Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers (UASC)).
- One in three of our care-experienced are recorded as UASC. Nationally, care-experienced young people who had been designated as UASC were around one-quarter of each cohort of new care experienced young people in 2021.

At March 2025, the care-experienced young people who were in education, employment, or training (EET) was 53%% (202 out of 381).



There are various well documented barriers for care-experienced young people to be able to transition to social and economic independence.

For many care-experienced young people, the idea of applying for and getting a job can be overwhelming as many of the things that other young people take for granted can be issues including clothing, travel, and food.

Keeping in Touch

The higher the percentage of care-experienced young people in touch gives Solihull the best opportunity for our Personal Advisers (PA) to offer advice, support, and information to make sure our young people are ready to leave care and live independently.

- 93% of 17-18-year-olds were in touch March 2025 compared to 81% in March 2024.
- 98% of 19-21-year-olds were in touch in March 2025 compared to 94% in March 2024.

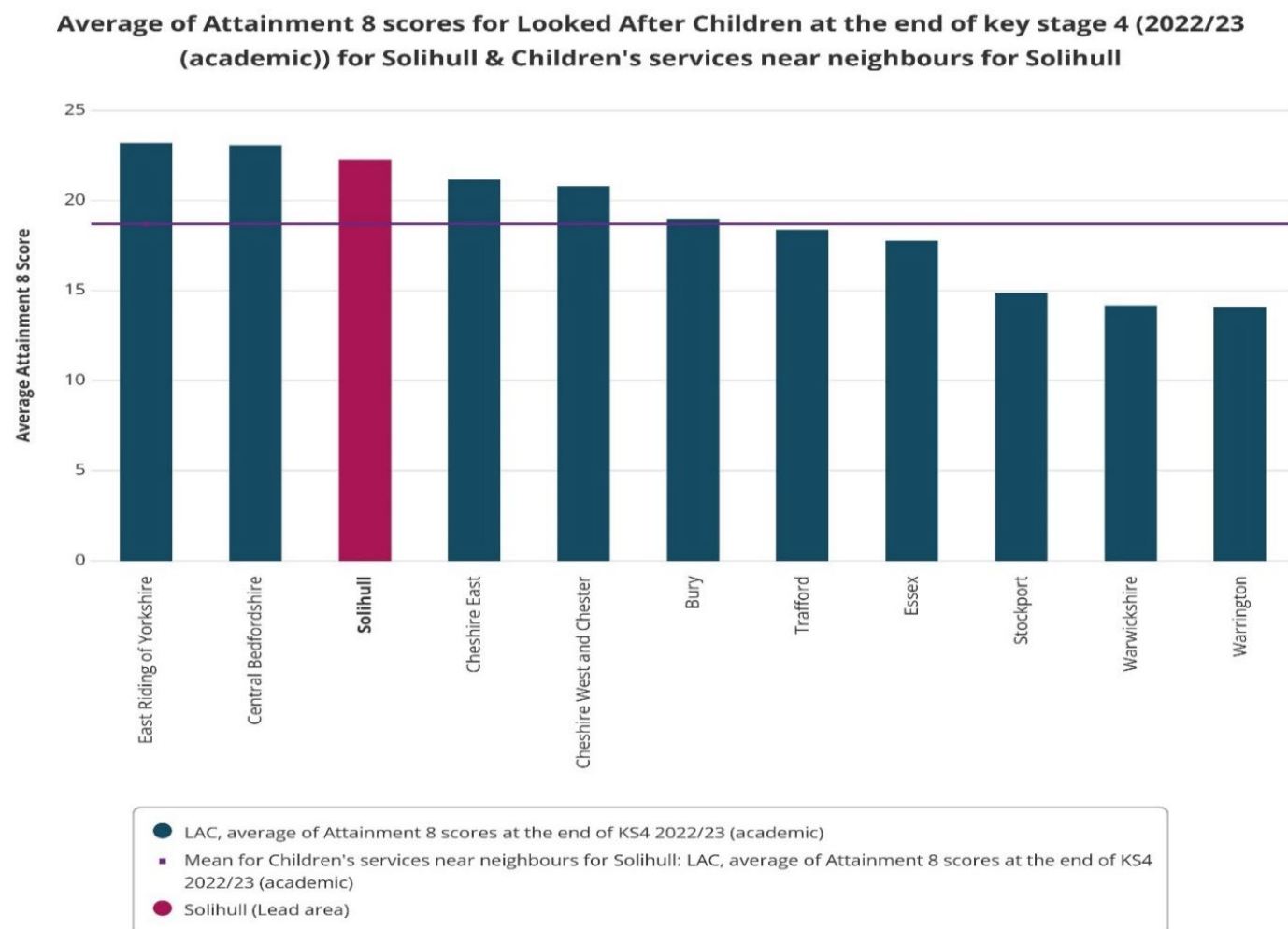
We continue to work within the Care Experiences service to ensure we are in touch with as many of our Care Experienced young people and this a priority area for the Care Experienced teams.

Education data

31% of cared for children achieved a pass in English and Maths at grade 4 and above at the end of KS4 in 2021/22 (academic) compared to 71.3% of Solihull pupils².

² [Statistics: GCSEs \(key stage 4\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/statistics/gcse-key-stage-4)

The Attainment 8 score measures the results of pupils at state-funded mainstream schools in England in 8 GCSE-level qualifications. The average attainment 8 score of all pupils in England was 46.3 in 2022/23.



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Source:
Department for Education

Year	Solihull	Mean for Comparator Councils	Mean for West Midlands ADASS Region
2018/19 (academic)	28.1	20.6	19.9
2019/20 (academic)	21.3	22.3	23.1
2020/21 (academic)	24.7	23.2	24.5
2021/22 (academic)	19.8	20	21.4
2022/23 (academic)	22.3	18.7	21.1

The results over five years³ are:

³ It should be noted that the more meaningful comparison for 2023 is with 2019, the last year that summer exams were taken before the pandemic

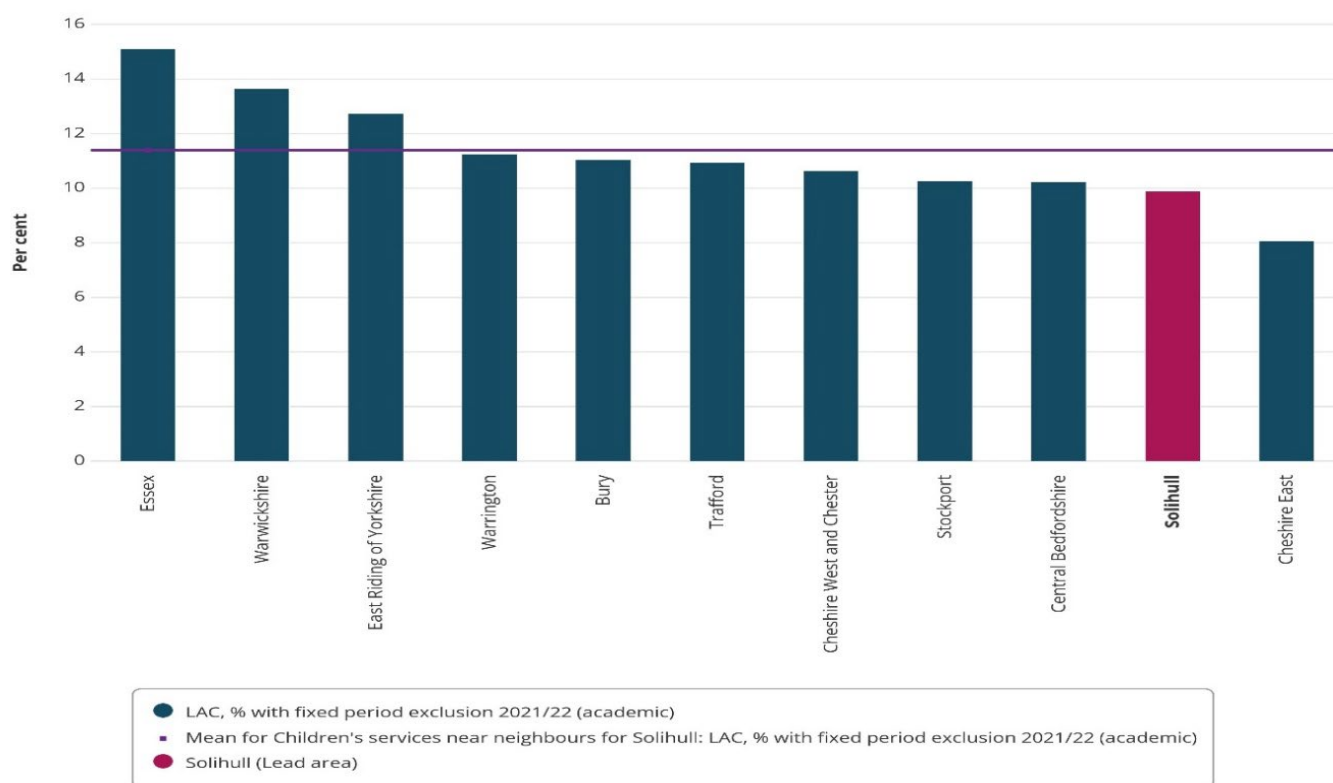
The average Attainment 8 score for cared for children was 22.3 in 2022/2023 (academic) compared to 45.9 for all Solihull children so whilst Solihull are performing better than comparator Councils the difference between attainment for cared for children and all Solihull children needs to be narrowed.

According to Oxfordshire's Virtual School for Cared for Children⁴, the exclusion of a cared for child is not an equal punishment as that of a child living with their family; the consequences can be the loss of their home not just their education.

The experience of trauma, loss and attachment difficulties can have long lasting effects on how children and young people relate to others, even if these new relationships are safe and positive. These experiences can lead to behavioural, emotional, and mental health difficulties⁵.

Exclusion rates are higher for cared for children than for all children in state schools.

Percentage of Looked after children with at least one fixed period exclusion from school (2021/22 (academic)) for Solihull & Children's services near neighbours for Solihull



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Source:
Department for Education

The Children's Commissioner's vision for care leavers⁶ identified that children in care were just as ambitious as other children when it came to their futures but in 2020/21 only 13% had progressed to higher education by the age of 19 compared to 45% of all other pupils.

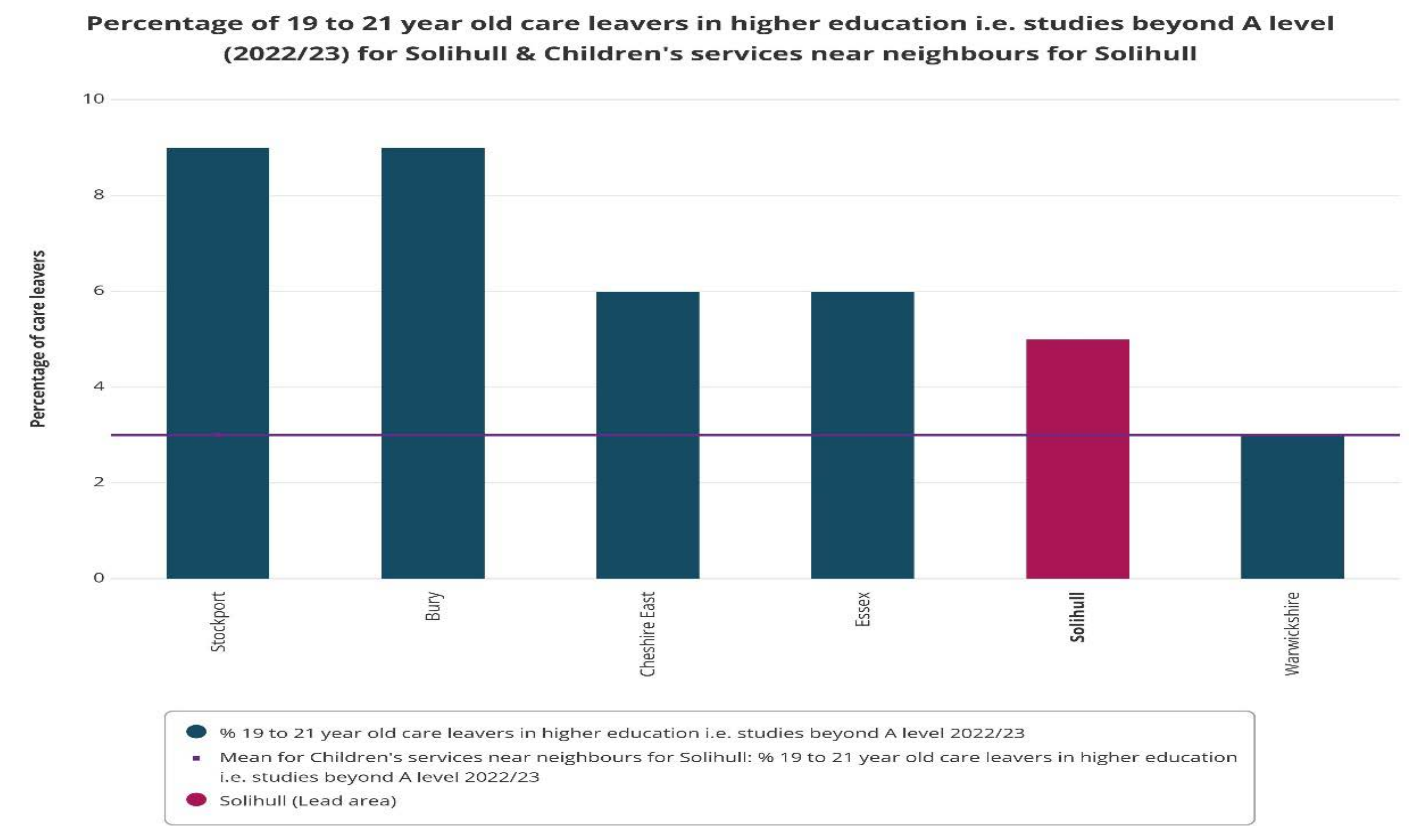
⁴ [Combating the cycle of exclusion for looked after children | IRIS](#)

⁵ *Support for looked after children in care - National Education Union*, <https://neu.org.uk/advice/classroom/behaviour-schools/preventing-and-reducing-exclusions/support-looked-after-children>.

⁶ [CC A4 HE](#)

Across the West Midlands local authorities, the highest percentages of 19- to 21-year-old care-experienced young people at university in 2022/23 were Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Coventry.

23 of the Solihull cohort at the end of September 2024 are recorded as being full time in higher education (i.e. studies beyond A level) and 53 are full time in education other than in higher education.



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Source:
Department for Education

As corporate parents, Solihull needs to set ambitious targets to ensure that every child in care can get suitable education, employment or training by improving their educational attainment. Choosing options in Year 9 is key to providing improved pathways to their ambitions.

Building relationships with local Universities to help and support our care leavers into higher education is likely to improve outcomes.

The 2024/25 EET data for Solihull was:

- 50% of those leaving care aged 19, 20 and 21 were confirmed to be in education, employment, or training, a reduction on last year's outturn of 53%.
- 60% aged 17 or 18 were confirmed to be in education, employment or training representing an increase compared from last year's figure of 52%.
- 11 young people representing 5% of care leavers aged 19, 20 and 21 were in higher education on the reporting date. This was a decline compared with last year's outturn of 15 young people (7%). Only one UASC young person was reported as being in higher education at the end of 2024/25.

Around 16% of our care-experienced are economically inactive so are currently unable to become EET due to illness, disability or looking after family.

What are we doing to increase the number of our Care Experienced young people into suitable education and employment

In July 2023, the Council made a formal decision to treat cared for children and those leaving our care as a protected characteristic in the same way as those groups covered under the Equality Act 2010.

The Community Parenting Board was subsequently developed and is now in place and 60+ offers/pledges have been made from local and national businesses.

Fortnightly EET clinics to match young people to EET opportunities and a work guide has been produced for all care-experienced young people, breaking down the steps into employment and sharing useful guidance and resources.

We have recruited a dedicated Link Worker (Education and Employment) post to manage and expand the Community Parenting work and offer. This is a significant role working closely with our Personal Advisors, SEND colleagues, and those in Youth Justice, and linking back with the Employment and Skills team, and other, partners and stakeholders. This purpose of this role is to bring all the parts of the system together, ensuring that staff who work with vulnerable young people get the right information about opportunities, and in time, will help shape new employment and training offers as we better understand their needs and aspirations.

More widely, the Employment and Skills team are taking part in a WMCA wide Youth Trailblazer pilot. This will put additional resource into joining up the wider system within the council, between Children's and Adults Services, Employment and Skills, with external partners such as DWP, Solihull College and other training providers. Learning from this one-year pilot may extend into ongoing youth co-ordination activity.

The Trailblazer will also deliver 40 work experience placements to young people age 18-21 with local employers, who will receive a financial contribution for offering short term unpaid placements and paid opportunities of 12+ weeks. We will support our Care Experienced young people to access these opportunities.

We have undertaken in-depth cohort analysis to understand who our NEET care leavers are and what bespoke support they may need to access employment. For example, we now have an organisation who are offering specialist support and mentoring for care-experienced young people in prison.

There are monthly performance clinics and a live tracker in place.

There are plans to work with [Care Leaver Covenant](#) for those young people placed outside of Solihull.

The [Care Leaver Covenant](#) (CLC) is part of the government's [keep on caring](#) strategy to support people leaving care to become independent.

It allows public, private and voluntary sector organisations to pledge support, including:

- apprenticeships
- work experience
- free or discounted goods and services

There is monthly monitoring of the number of active Pathway Plans in place for young people.

Our Personal Advisers are preparing a calendar of regular activities for care-experienced young people, for example cooking and sport, to help build their skills. We anticipate this being in place by the end of 2025.

We have found premises and are progressed plans for a local café to host drop-in sessions for care-experienced young people, where we will offer support and advice.

We work jointly across the Virtual School, care-experienced team and Employment & Skills to champion EET for all young people.

Practical help has been offered by local businesses including a Starter Kit supplied by the Dodd Group enabling our young people to move into their first home with a pack of supplies. Laptops supplied by Paragon Bank are enabling our young people to access courses, apply for jobs and apprenticeships and complete other life admin.

ONE OF OUR CARE-EXPERIENCED
YOUNG PEOPLE HAS JUST
STARTED A FULL TIME JOB WITH
THE NHS. SHE WAS IN RECEIPT
OF ONE OF PARAGON'S LAPTOPS

The Birmingham Diocesan Multi-Academy Trust have offered two of their maintenance operatives to help our young people with small DIY tasks and Balfour Beatty have provided a Home Improvement Scheme at short notice to help move care-experienced young people into accommodation. This will need reviewing around the continuation of this in to 2026

35 referrals have been made to the NHS Universal Family Programme: Support into Work with six young people who have succeeded into employment. We hope this offer will continue.

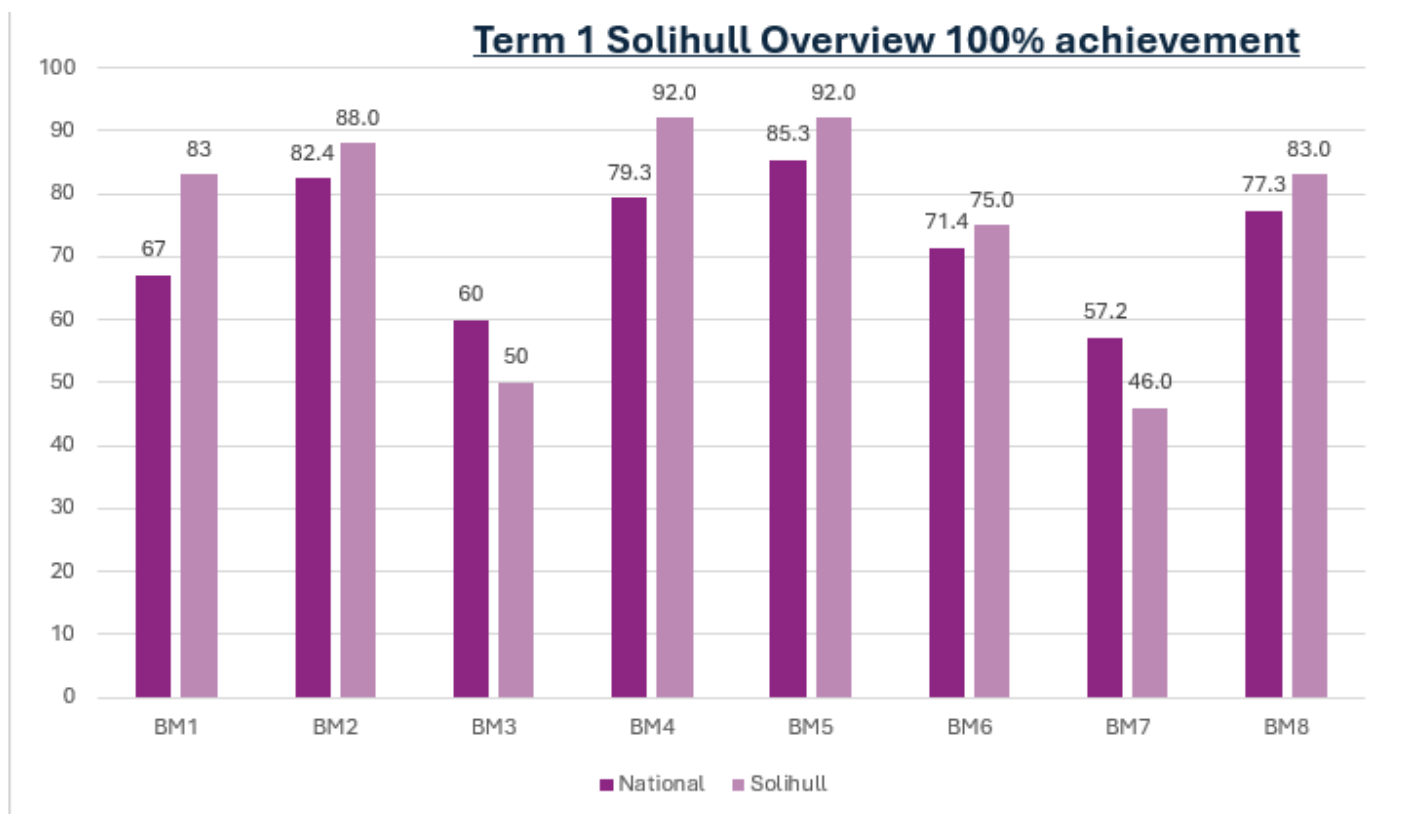
A website has been developed which allows employers to post specific offers for care-experienced young people - Match my project The Careers Hub; -

The Hub works across 24 local schools in Solihull (Secondary/Academy/Further Education) to provide qualitative careers advice and guidance for all pupils/learners looking to develop work related experiences whilst they are in their education setting.

Each school assign careers leads from within their staff to manage deliver across year groups, this support includes work experience, knowledge of local opportunities, developing SEND communities for post 16 transition and meeting Virtual Education services to support young pupils that care experienced, providing them with local careers related options.

The Careers Hub works under national guidelines for delivery, working towards Gatsby Benchmarks in Solihull, these are the priority objectives that Solihull is assessed on for delivering qualitative careers guidance for all pupils/learners.

- BM1 -A stable careers programme
- BM2 -Learning from careers and labour market information
- BM3 - Addressing the needs of each student.
- BM4 - Linking curriculum learning to careers.
- BM5 - Encounters with employers and employees.
- BM6 - Experiences of workplaces.
- BM7 - Encounters with further and higher education.
- BM8 - Personal guidance.



The Careers Hub works with Virtual Educational Governing Board to ensure those pupils that care experienced and possibly in out of borough provision receive as best an offer as possible to help those young people access support.

Skills for Success - Risk of NEET Offer

Wherever the schools/further education providers have pupils that are struggling to sustain their education/learning and that are post 16 (Years 11 upwards), then Skills for Success can work with the young people/schools and referring services (may come from outside of school) to help that young person sustain their education and look for apprenticeships or work.

Skills for Success collaborate with schools on activities and negotiate curriculum timetables to help that young person progress towards their career aspirations; the advice include aspirational workshops, employer encounters, help with study and support for external factors in their lives.

Once referred these young pupils will receive support until they sustain in education/apprenticeships or will then be referred to post 16 NEET support delivered by Employment and Skills Team.

Post 16 NEET Offer for Employment & Skills: -

Where young people are NEET or unemployed, but are ready to look for work or training, the Employment and Skills team provides intensive support with a named specialist advisor to support young people with their aspirations. Using our local tracking data, as soon as we are aware that a young person becomes NEET, they are contacted by an employment officer and offered support. The new link worker post will help to share up to date information about the young person and

develop links between services to ensure teams/services are aware of and use all the tools at their disposal to help the young person progress, for the young person this should be seamless but supported by an extensive action plan or vocational profile.

Care-experienced young people have very often experienced traumatic events which can affect their ability to cope and function. The various disruptions they face, and often negative experiences of school delay their learning and reduce attainment. Our care-experienced young people can have high levels of need so different resources, opportunities and support is required to provide equity with others.

Our Personal Advisors play a key role in supporting our young people and are fundamental to building relationships with young people and including signposting to services, providing advice and guidance and providing individual support to young people in line with their needs and circumstances.

The help and support that other young people receive from their parents is not always available to our children and young people and can cause issues for their progress into work. This can be something as simple as having a chat about the best way to get to their workplace, what they should wear and being given cash to get some lunch until they first get paid.

Young people without parental support are unlikely to be able to access a car to get them to work. There are weaknesses⁷ in the bus network in the borough with the focus on routes into Birmingham and with the north and south of the borough only connected with a long journey time which puts people off travelling. Bus services are not integrated with cycle routes or rail services.

Where young people are accessing support via the employment and skills team, there is financial support available for travel passes, interview clothes and other in work expenses to make the transition to paid work easier.

Levels of starting salaries for apprenticeships are variable and are dependent on many factors. The National Minimum Wage for an apprentice is £7.55 per hour for those aged 16 to 18 and aged 19 or over and in the first year which when a care-experienced young person is having to live in your own home without parental support will mean you are highly likely to struggle financially to maintain the accommodation. Commitments from employers to pay more than the minimum shows their commitment to our care-experienced young people for example, the NHS commit to allowing care-experienced to receive a Band 2 salaries for their apprenticeships currently £23,614 a year. Without parental support young people also struggle to get equipment and if they are on benefits the costs of items are prohibitive.

⁷ [Solihull Connected Transport Strategy](#)

Although Solihull is the least deprived upper tier local authority in the West Midlands (IMD 2019) it should be noted that it is polarised and includes a concentration of neighbourhoods in North Solihull among the most deprived in England. The number of areas in Solihull amongst the 10% most deprived has increased from 10 in 2007 to 16 in 2019.

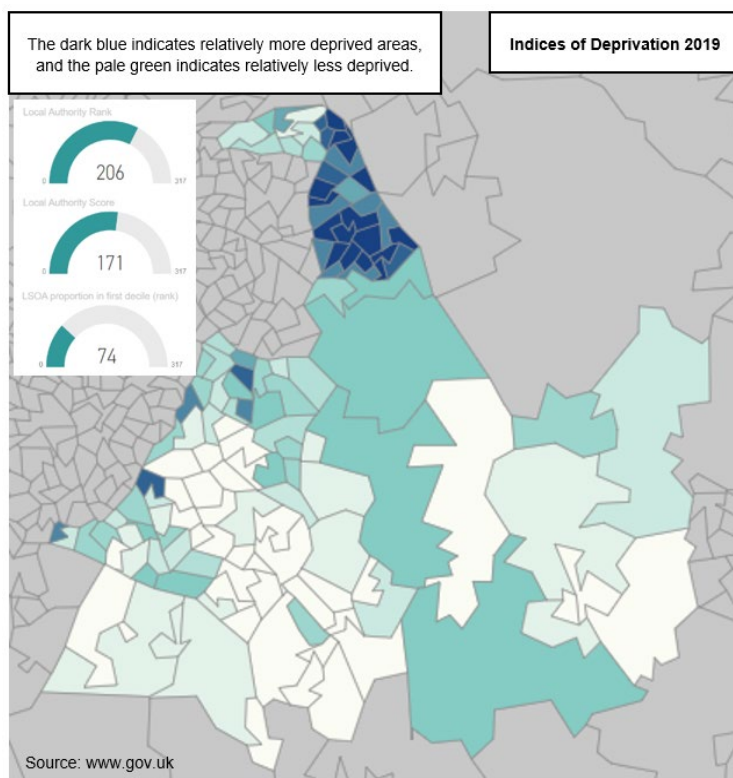
The English Indices of Deprivation 2019 will next be updated in 2025.

Many of our children in care originate from these more deprived areas and it is essential that their needs are considered as early as possible so that intervention can be out in place to prevent them from becoming unemployed and without access to training and support. .

Substantial child poverty increases have been seen in the Midlands. The constituency where Solihull's most deprived neighbourhoods are located has seen increases in child poverty from 26.4% in 2014/15 to 30.1% in 2021/22⁸ (compared to a child poverty rate of 19.6% in the previous Solihull Constituency in 2021/22). The child poverty rate is highly likely to be even higher than 30.1% in the north of the Borough because the Meriden Constituency as was included the more affluent areas of Knowle and Dorridge.

In 2023/24 7,171 children were living in families in absolute low income (income Before Housing Costs) an increase from 5,916 in 2019/20.

There is a strong correlation between areas of deprivation and children being taken into care^{9 10} so events that move children into poverty increase the likelihood that they will experience harm and be taken into care. However, that is not the whole picture as there are thousands of families who live with very little financially and do not abuse or neglect their children and whilst the report highlights that child maltreatment will be vastly underreported there are other factors that lead to a child being taken into care. The ONS identified that health, education, housing, and family circumstances were all important characteristics separating those who did and did not enter care¹¹.



⁸ [Where is child poverty increasing in the UK? | Action For Children](#)

⁹ [Profound inequalities in child welfare intervention - Nuffield Foundation](#)

¹⁰ [Full-report-relationship-between-poverty-child-abuse-and-neglect.pdf \(nuffieldfoundation.org\)](#)

¹¹ [Who are the children entering care in England? - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

Implementation of the strategy

While some of our young people are highly motivated to improve their employment opportunities others are simply not yet work ready, due to a range of circumstances and factors, and it will take time before we can expect them to be in employment, education or training. However, we can continue to support them in line with their individual needs.

Improving our cared for children's educational attainment will provide the best opportunity to improve their prospects whilst recognising that not all children will thrive in a formal education setting.

Our ambition as corporate parents are to have a network of people, companies and indeed the whole of Solihull contributing towards a positive future for our care-experienced young people. Moving from corporate parenting to a philosophy of community parenting. Providing meaningful opportunities that have a bigger impact.

"I WANT PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND PEOPLE IN CARE ARE OVERLOOKED AND MISS JUDGED AND CAN BEEN SEEN AS A STATISTIC BASED OF THE CHOICES THEY MAKE IN LIFE BUT I AM A STRONG BELIEVER AS I AM ONE OF MANY AND MANY MORE THAT CAN AND HAVE CHANGED AND ALL WE NEED IS A CHANCE SO I WANT TO SAY THANK YOU TO THOSE WHO HAVE GIVEN ME CHANCES AND STUCK BY ME GUIDED ME THROUGH MANY HARD TIMES AND STILL GAVE ME OPPORTUNITIES"

We need to support and challenge staff, carers and employers to be more ambitious in their approach and work.

We need to think differently and from a new perspective to harness the contribution that care-experienced young people can make and also be aware of their unconscious bias¹²

which may mean that young people are not being enabled to reach their full potential.

- Practitioners across all teams and services to engage with children in care in earlier discussions around careers to ensure there is effective planning and support in place as early as possible.
- Education providers and employers need a greater awareness of trauma and other needs to provide equity within schools and during the employment process.
- Ensure the Link Worker role that has been developed, is as effective as can be, and work alongside colleagues in Employment and Skills who will engage with local employers to obtain education and employment opportunities specifically designed to cater for those young people who have experienced care.
- To fully consider how we link into the West Midlands Mayor's [Youth Unemployment Plan](#) particularly to see what assistance may be available for those who live outside the Borough closer to their home address.

¹² [Unconscious bias - Equality, diversity and inclusion - Acas](#)

- Initially ring-fence Trailblazer work experience opportunities (paid or unpaid) to Care experienced young people where they meet the employer's criteria.
- Consider how to provide a better offer of local work experience to under 16-year-olds.
- Provide preferential access to the Council's own work opportunities for care-experienced young people.
- Consider what further support that can be given to those care-experienced young people currently in prison to ensure they are being given education or training to prepare them for when they are released.
- Consider how to provide UASC more opportunities for education and local ESOL courses throughout the year.
- Evidence to be collected for local projects set up to help care-experienced young people into employment to show effectiveness.

Key performance indicators

We are ambitious for our young people and therefore we have put in place a number of key performance indicators over the next 2 years

In March 2025, the care-experienced young people who were in education, employment, or training (EET) was 53%%.

Our aim is by the end of March 2026 is that this will be 55%, and by the end of March 2027 this will be 60%, placing us above statistical neighbours and England average and specifically for those aged 18-20 years of age.

Monitoring of the strategy

The strategy and associated work will be overseen by the Head of service for Corporate Parenting and via the development of an Education and Employment monthly working group involving key partner agencies, stakeholders and colleagues across the Council group.

The new Link Worker role is key to our ambitions and planning

It is proposed that an action plan is developed overseen by the working group to drive forward the strategy and in order to measure success, monthly data should also be made available to the working group to fully consider the impact of the strategy, the various works steams taking place and that the working Group reports directly into Corporate Parenting Board.

A review of the strategy will take place in April 2026 to consider the impact, and any updates required.

Action plan

Desired outcome	Action	By whom	By when
1, Increase the number of Apprenticeships offered to Care Experienced young people across the Council and including within Children's Services	Undertake a specific focussed piece of work across the Council in conjunction with HR colleagues to increase numbers month on month and including data collection in this area	Nikara Lucas	End of March 2026
2, To increase the employment and training opportunities for Care Experienced young people across Solihull	Set up and develop an Education and Employment monthly working group involving key stakeholders, to track progress in this area and including key learning and achievements/barriers for young people	Selina Rawicz	By the end of November 2025
3, Increase the overall % of Care Experienced young people in suitable education, training and employment	Review monthly data around any specific trends relating to young people in suitable training and employment and including benchmarking regionally and nationally	Members of the Education and Employment Group	Each month in line with data reporting
4, The Care Leaver Covenant supports plans and planning for Care Experienced young people regardless of where they live in the Country	Promote the Care Leavers Covenant across the service and to all Personal Advisors and to wider stakeholders	Members of the Education and Employment Group	End of March 2026