

# Corporate Parenting Committee

Monday 11 November 2024

2.00 pm

Ground floor meeting rooms B and C, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1  
2QH

## Membership

Councillor Jasmine Ali (Chair)  
Councillor Esme Dobson  
Councillor Natasha Ennin  
Councillor Youcef Hassaine  
Councillor Sarah King  
Councillor Maria Linforth-Hall  
Councillor Charlie Smith

## Reserves

Councillor Irina Von Wiese  
Councillor Sunny Lambe  
Councillor Joseph Vambe  
Councillor Kath Whittam  
Councillor Renata Hamvas

## Non-voting co-opted members

Dr Mark Kerr and Rosamond Marshall

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## INFORMATION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

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### Access to information

You have the right to request to inspect copies of minutes and reports on this agenda as well as the background documents used in the preparation of these reports.

### Babysitting/Carers allowances

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### Access

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### Contact

Email: [paula.thornton@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:paula.thornton@southwark.gov.uk) or [beverley.olamijulo@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:beverley.olamijulo@southwark.gov.uk)

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Members of the committee are summoned to attend this meeting

**Althea Loderick**

Chief Executive

Date: 31 October 2024



## Corporate Parenting Committee

Monday 11 November 2024

2.00 pm

Ground floor meeting rooms B and C, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

### Order of Business

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#### **MOBILE PHONES**

Mobile phones should be turned off or put on silent during the course of the meeting.

#### **PART A - OPEN BUSINESS**

##### **1. APOLOGIES**

To receive any apologies for absence.

##### **2. CONFIRMATION OF VOTING MEMBERS**

A representative of each political group will confirm the voting members of the committee.

##### **3. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR FOR THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE 2024-25**

To elect a vice-chair for the corporate parenting committee 2024-25.

##### **4. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT**

In special circumstances, an item of business may be added to an agenda within five clear days of the meeting.

Item No.	Title	Page No.
5.	<b>DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS</b>	
	Members to declare any interests and dispensations in respect of any item of business to be considered at this meeting.	
6.	<b>MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING (2.05PM TO 2.10PM)</b>	1 - 9
	To approve as a correct record the minutes of the open section of the meeting held on 17 July 2024.	
7.	<b>SPEAKERBOX VERBAL UPDATE (2.10PM TO 2.40PM)</b>	-
8.	<b>CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24 (2.40PM - 3.00PM)</b>	10 - 42
9.	<b>ANNUAL VIRTUAL HEADTEACHER'S REPORT 2023-2024 (3.00PM - 3.20PM)</b>	To follow
10.	<b>INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS (IRO) ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24 (3.20PM - 3.40PM)</b>	43 - 78
11.	<b>QUALITY ASSURANCE REPORT ON CHILDREN HOMES (3.40PM - 3.55PM)</b>	To follow
12.	<b>CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE – WORK PLAN 2024-25 (3.55PM TO 4.00PM)</b>	79 - 82

**ANY OTHER OPEN BUSINESS AS NOTIFIED AT THE START OF THE MEETING AND ACCEPTED BY THE CHAIR AS URGENT.**

#### **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

The following motion should be moved, seconded and approved if the sub-committee wishes to exclude the press and public to deal with reports revealing exempt information:

“That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1-7, Access to Information Procedure rules of the Constitution.”

**Item No.**

**Title**

**Page No.**

**PART B - CLOSED BUSINESS**

**ANY OTHER CLOSED BUSINESS AS NOTIFIED AT THE START  
OF THE MEETING AND ACCEPTED BY THE CHAIR AS  
URGENT**

Date: 31 October 2024



## Corporate Parenting Committee

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on Wednesday 17 July 2024 at 2.00 pm at Ground floor meeting rooms, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

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**PRESENT:** Councillor Charlie Smith (In the chair for the meeting)  
Councillor Youcef Hassaine

**OTHER  
MEMBERS  
PRESENT:**

Rosamund Marshall (foster carer)

**OFFICER  
SUPPORT:**

Alasdair Smith, Director, Children and Families  
Helen Woolgar, Assistant Director – Safeguarding and Care  
Elaine Reid, Head of Service: Permanence and Resources  
Dr Stacy John-Legere, Designated doctor for Looked After Children, Southwark  
Dr Jenny Taylor, Head of Clinical Service  
Joy Edwards, Designated Nurse for Looked after Children  
Sophie Jones, Fostering Service Manager  
Dechaun Malcolm, Children's Rights and Participation Officer and chair of SpeakerBox (and young people)  
Usha Singh, Virtual Headteacher  
Paula Thornton, Constitutional Officer  
Beverley Olamijulo, Constitutional Officer (clerk)

### 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillor Jasmine Ali (chair)  
Councillor Esme Dobson  
Councillor Natasha Ennin  
Councillor Sarah King  
Councillor Maria Linforth-Hall and  
Dr Mark Kerr.

Councillor Charlie Smith took the position as chair for this meeting.

## **2. CONFIRMATION OF VOTING MEMBERS**

The members listed as present were confirmed as the voting members for the meeting.

## **3. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR FOR THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE 2024-25**

### **RESOLVED:**

That the election of the vice-chair for the corporate parenting committee 2024-25 be deferred until the next meeting.

## **4. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT**

There were no urgent items.

## **5. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS**

None were declared.

## **6. MINUTES**

### **RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 April 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the chair.

## **7. SPEAKER BOX - VERBAL UPDATE**

Dechaun Malcolm, children's rights and participation officer, along with the young people and representatives of SpeakerBox provided an update to committee:

### **SPEAKERBOX VERBAL UPDATE**

The committee noted:

- Focussed on engagement between April to June which had increased by 34%

- During the last quarter there were 436 episodes where young people participated in various events
- There was a 34% increase compared to 2023, and over 300 forms of engagement took place

Young people participated in the following ways:

- Delivered training
- Recruitment
- Co-facilitated at the Learning Fest
- Attended consultations
- Attended meetings of the corporate parenting committee.

## **Engagement**

Building the community which included:

- Summer cook-out and Thorpe Park; Events like these provided an opportunity to attract new young people to the service and meet other young people with care experience.

## **Website**

- Young people worked on the SpeakerBox website with a professional web designer
- The purpose of the site was to extend the services that was designed by young people, whilst encouraging more engagement for the young people that lived outside the borough
- To ensure the website would be a great source of information – young people's rights and what they were entitled to.

## **The young people's influence – the big ones**

### **The innovation project**

- Purpose of the group
- Current projects (current guidance)
- Future goals
- Empower – on the opportunities the young people wanted to achieve
- Feedback from staff and parents, provided a space that allowed people to come together to create solutions
- Staff said it was with to share ideas with the young people

### **The director's forum – which highlighted the following:**

- Issues that affected young people in Southwark

- Covered topics such as immigration and issues facing care leavers
- Networking with the directors and present feedback to the young people
- Directors met with young people face to face and discussed creating the best opportunities and benefits for young people
- Build on the three main priorities: “What home means to you”
  - Home, lets create a nice space, family, friends or my own space, x-box and soft bed. *Created by children 5 – 7 years old*
  - Home is the place I can go, where my heart feels free, people I see and the neighbours next to me. *Created by children 7 – 12 years old*
- Representatives of Speakerbox worked with young people particularly those from a younger age group. The children were interested in being role models also, they came up with some amazing ideas.

### **Consultation with SEND**

- Aims of the session
- Topics they talked about
- What they left them with

### **Feedback from staff – some comments below:**

“It was good to be part of the space provided to listen to the young people and hear some of the deep rooted things that they have to process which impacts their thoughts, feelings and decisions and talking about their hopes/aspirations for the future.

It highlighted even more the importance of continuing to have the young person’s voice present and ensuring that schools/professionals are connecting with their voice and seeking to understand it.”

### **Feedback from Young People - summary**

“At the beginning of the consultation, I felt intimidated by all the adults there because I have social anxiety and I am shy. As I got to know them I opened up more and I found it inspirational. The lady that spoke to me was very funny and made me feel comfortable sharing my experiences. She never judged me. The department listened and took what we said into consideration. I could see them trying their best to help us in every way they can.”

“I think other departments should do this to help young people in care. I think if



young people and departments work together young people will get the help they need and feel more comfortable sharing their view and vision of the care system.”

The meeting were given updates on:

### **Children’s home project**

- Visiting Mary’s mansion
- Children’s guide consultation
- Recruitment

### **Event Planning**

The big celebration  
 The summer cook-out  
 The Speaker Box party (20 years)

### **Moving forward**

Opportunities:

- Employment and accessibility
- Entry level experiences
- Equity over equality

Corporate Parenting:

- Wanting to engage more from our community
- Meetings twice a year - in the evenings
- School holidays

Elections:

- Central government change
- Changes for young people

Directors’ Forum:

Six Speaker Box members ran a take-over session on the 24 June 2024, at the Southwark’s Directors Forum. They met with the team of directors who included the chief executive.

The young members highlighted their six top priorities which were:

- Housing
- Finance
- Education

- Care
- Employment Accessibility Opportunities
- Immigration.

Positive outcomes for children and young people

During the past ten months, Speaker Box provided opportunities for young people, which included:

- Developing and acquiring new skills
- Feeling heard through direct advocacy via CROs
- Having a secured base with consistent adults
- Became more confident in public speaking
- A better understanding of rights for young people
- Improved emotional well-being
- Improved aspirations and career paths.

### **Looking ahead 2024-25**

- To re-brand and develop the Speaker Box website and extend their outreach to more children and young people
- To attend their first residential in over seven years, partially funded by the VS and LEAP (listen, empathise, ask, paraphrase and summarise)
- More campaigning
- To work in partnership with human resources so as to develop a programme for young people in recruitment.
- To start a pod-cast that would be led by care leavers.

In conclusion with an extended team, the young people plan to do more, reach and empower more of the children and young people.

The young people responded to questions from members.

The chair thanked the young people for their presentation.

## **8. DRAFT ANNUAL HEALTH REPORT FOR CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER**

Joy Edwards, designated nurse for Children Looked After (CLA) Southwark. Dr Jenny Taylor, virtual mental health lead for Looked After Children and Dr Stacy John-Legere, consultant community paediatrician – designated doctor for Looked After Children, Southwark were present to give an overview on this item.

The committee noted:

- The health and residential needs; and seeking assistance from providers – concerning service delivery

- Reported issues and concerns – referred to the board
- Regular review of 16 – 15 cohorts
- Review of older young people going into care – continued support and full access to these services
- With the change in demographics in the borough – especially with young people reaching the age of choice – they sometimes return to their birth parents
- Health services – accessing areas of health services and identifying the young people’s needs – ensuring they are dealt with in a timely manner
- Addressed the mental health challenges of young people
- Identify areas of needs for children – gender identify services – Doncaster review placed in residential care management
- Audit of children placed, learning and development
- Brief overview – relating to speaker box, strategy health assessment and engagement with young people
- To address the difficulty of young people receiving a routine health check
- Training was provided – to promote the health of care-leavers
- Free prescription for care leavers; exemption certificate which was received through their parental guardian
- Strategic meetings – which was attended by the integrated care board
- Children that were seen and knowing what their experiences, data collecting, completed health assessments
- Immunisations amongst young people had a 69% increase from the previous years – which was undertaken through the public health emergency
- Sunshine house can book clinics during the summer holidays (CAMPHS and LAC) – could also access clinics
- A focus on dental care for young people was addressed
- Speaker box – to create more awareness about it to help bridge the gap
- Virtual school – Education health plans (EHPS)
- Focus on social and emotional needs (e.g., autism)
- Mental health - looked after children that struggle with their well-being
- Difficulties getting foster carers
- Health assessment with specialist team and Care Link
- Care Link work on unaccompanied asylum seekers and care leavers
- Post care leavers (18+) are provided counselling and support
- New processes in place to prevent long delays with assessments
- Southwark’s launch on lifelong links – to support young people in care particularly those that have lost contact with their relatives
- Outer borough services for care leavers were difficult and Care Links helped to address this issue
- Providing awareness for young people with a healthy eating programme especially when they are on a budget.

Officers responded to questions.

The chair thanked officers for their presentation.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the committee noted the report contents in relation to the delivery of health services for Children Looked After (CLA) and Care Leavers that are in the care of the London borough of Southwark.
2. That the committee agreed to feedback any comments on the Southwark Children Looked After Health report for consideration by the Children Looked After Health leads across the health economy.

**9. FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024**

Sophie Jones, Fostering Service manager and Emma were present at the meeting along with foster carers, Rosamund and Kenny.

Officers presented the report and provided an overview on the fostering services.

- Priority: Recruitment and providing support, to ensure there was stability for placements and for carers receive the necessary support
- Counselling services for young people which had special guidelines which involve:
  - Development time during the support process – example; arranging coffee mornings
  - Recognising the needs of the carer and
  - Training programme for a foster carer
  - More data analysis on special guardian support plan review.

Kenny mentioned he had been a foster carer for 6 years. He explained that he receives full support from the fostering team especially during challenging situations.

Rosamund stated that she had been a foster carer for 20 years. She had experience fostering a child who used to be a gang member. She said without the backing of Southwark who provided her with support the situation would have been difficult to manage.

Helen Woolgar:

- Long term carers are often in very overcrowded conditions in their accommodation
- Four bedroom flat specially built for foster carers
- Extra help needed and more resources and help should be provided especially as some were council tenants and others were in private accommodation.

A young person asked about the difference between connected carers and special guardians allowances.

- Connected carers is the same as fostering allowances
- Special guardianship – means tested or put on a support plan; works in a slightly different way
- Connected carers have the same allowances as fosters carers.

The chair thanked everyone for their contribution to the meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

That the annual report of Southwark's fostering service for 2023-2024 be noted.

**10. CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE - WORK PLAN 2024-25**

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the workplan 2024-25 draft outline be noted as set out in the report.
2. That the committee would review any further items for consideration in the workplan.

**Note:** It was agreed an item on the employment charter would be considered at a corporate parenting committee meeting.

The meeting ended at 4.00 pm.

**CHAIR:**

**DATED:**

<b>Meeting Name:</b>	Corporate Parenting Committee
<b>Date:</b>	11 November 2024
<b>Report title:</b>	Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2023-24
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>	All
<b>Classification:</b>	Open
<b>From:</b>	Alasdair Smith, Director of Children's Services

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That the committee

1. Consider the report contents and structure and advise on changes or additions in preparation for cabinet on 7 January 2025.
2. Note the 2023-24 draft priorities and agrees to recommend these to cabinet.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. The purpose of this report is to provide the Corporate Parenting Committee with a report in accordance with para 9 of Part 3J of the council's constitution relating to the Corporate Parenting Committee, describing one of its roles and functions to report to the council's cabinet on an annual basis.
4. This annual report on corporate parenting will be submitted to cabinet from the Corporate Parenting Committee. There are no specific matters reserved to this committee. The reason for this is that the role and function of the committee is to review and monitor the council's role as a corporate parent. This involves the participation of members on a cross political group committee.
5. Any specific actions the committee might identify as necessary would be executive functions and need to be taken by a cabinet decision maker, in accordance with cabinet responsibility for functions.
6. The full annual report is set out in Appendix A. The committee is asked to consider whether the proposed report, its content and structure, are what it wishes to report to cabinet on the delivery of the council's corporate parenting duties over the last year.

### **Key / Non-Key decisions**

7. The report does not relate to a key-decision.

### **Policy framework implications**

8. There are no policy implications arising from this report.

### **Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts**

#### **Community impact statement**

9. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, lays out the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which requires public bodies to consider all individuals when carrying out their day to day work – in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees. It requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. The council's Approach to Equality commits the council to ensuring that equality is an integral part of our day to day business.
10. The council's Children's Services involves working closely with all relevant stakeholders and partners across the sector and collectively we are committed to upholding the responsibilities towards advocating the Public Sector Equality Duty and complying with the Equalities Act 2010. 13. The PSED enables public bodies to consider the diverse needs of groups and have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. Due regard is about considering the different needs of protected characteristics in relation to the three parts of the duty.
11. The Equalities Act 2010 define the following as protected characteristics; age; disability, gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation. Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement
12. The report takes account of the ethnicity, age and disabilities of children in care, as well as their racial ethnic background and considers the impact of services delivered to them.

### **Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement**

13. A number of research studies and analyses have identified a clear social gradient in relation to social care statutory intervention to promote the protection and the welfare of children. We know that the greater the levels of deprivation and disadvantage faced by families the higher the likelihood that they will become involved with children's services nationally. This trend is consistent in Southwark with the level of deprivation in the home wards of the children in our care being strongly correlated with the numbers of children in care.
14. Children from black/black British and mixed/multiple global majority groups are disproportionately overrepresented in our children in care population when we compare them against the overall population of children in Southwark. This reflects national research around such intersectionality in relation to deprivation as described above. Overrepresentation of global majority communities is compounded when we account for unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
15. Of the group of children in our care at the end of March 2024, when reviewed against the age at which they came into care, with the exception of the group from a white background who entered care at age 16 or 17, there is a trend towards later entry into care particularly for children from Black/Black British backgrounds, and earlier entry for children from white and mixed backgrounds. The disproportionate increase in the white care population entering at age 16 relates primarily to white British females entering care due to concerns around their mental health and emotional wellbeing.
16. Overall there are more males (58%) in our care than females (42%). This trend is exacerbated again by age with more males entering care in later adolescence and slightly more females entering care in early adolescence.
17. Research suggests that when children in care are compared with children who have not been in care, they tend to have poorer outcomes in a number of areas including their and mental and physical health. Corporate parenting work seeks to address these inequalities.  
Health impact statement

### **Climate change implications**

18. There are no relevant climate change implications.

### **Resource implications**

19. There are no relevant resourcing implications.



**BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
<a href="#">Corporate Parenting Strategy</a>	160 Tooley Street, London	Clare Pitchford 0207 525 5000

**APPENDICES**

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2023-24

**AUDIT TRAIL**

<b>Lead Officer</b>	Alasdair Smith, Director of Children's Services	
<b>Report Author</b>	Clare Pitchford, Senior Service Development Officer	
<b>Version</b>	Final	
<b>Dated</b>	29 October 2024	
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No	
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments Included</b>
Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance	No	No
Strategic Director, Resources	No	No
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	No	No
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>	29 October 2024	



# Southwark Council

# Corporate Parenting

## Annual Report 2023-24

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## Foreword – Councillor Jasmine Ali, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Refugees

I am delighted to introduce the Corporate Parenting Annual report for 2023-24 to Cabinet. I am also delighted to share this foreword with members of our Children in Care Council, SpeakerBox.

We know that the care experience for children and young people in the UK can be a mixed bag for many. Even with a powerful parent that is the state, the outcomes for children in care are not always as positive as they should be. Here in Southwark nothing is as important to us as supporting the children and young people in our care. We are committed to finding ways to develop and improve our services. We want to make sure our children and young people get the best start in life that they deserve.

We have seen a number of developments over 2023-24 including our first children's home in over a decade and a refreshed recruitment campaign for foster carers. Amongst lots of other exciting innovations outlined in this report. We are committed to providing secure and stable homes for our children and young people to ensure lasting positive outcomes as they become independent adults.

We have supported SpeakerBox to run a number of activities and opportunities for our children in care and care leavers. This includes a winter ball, an annual celebration awards ceremony, photography courses, cookery courses and many other exciting events that we have heard about from young people at each meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee. We have championed the voices of children and young people by formalising groups of children to consult with us on challenges they face and to consult on service development.

I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to all the children and young people that have participated over the last year as well as all of the Corporate Parenting Committee for their continued commitment to strengthening services for children in care and care leavers.

Going into 2024-25, we know we still have work to do with the challenges that we still face including accessing opportunities for employment and housing as well as achieving well at school and living in safe, stable homes.

We continue to be ambitious for our children and young people, striving for the best opportunities and services for them and we look forward to the future and a refreshed Corporate Parenting Strategy 2025-2030. Because nothing is too good for the children and young people in our care.

## Foreword – Speakerbox – Southwark Children in Care Council

We are SpeakerBox – we are a collective of young people who are active in the Children in Care Council and advocacy service. We are a diverse group of people who are passionate about providing support to our peers and committed to getting involved in initiatives to improve services to other children and young people. This report is an important document that lets you know what the Corporate Parenting Committee has been doing over the last year and what is important for the next one. It is important for children and young people to get involved and drive change from the inside.

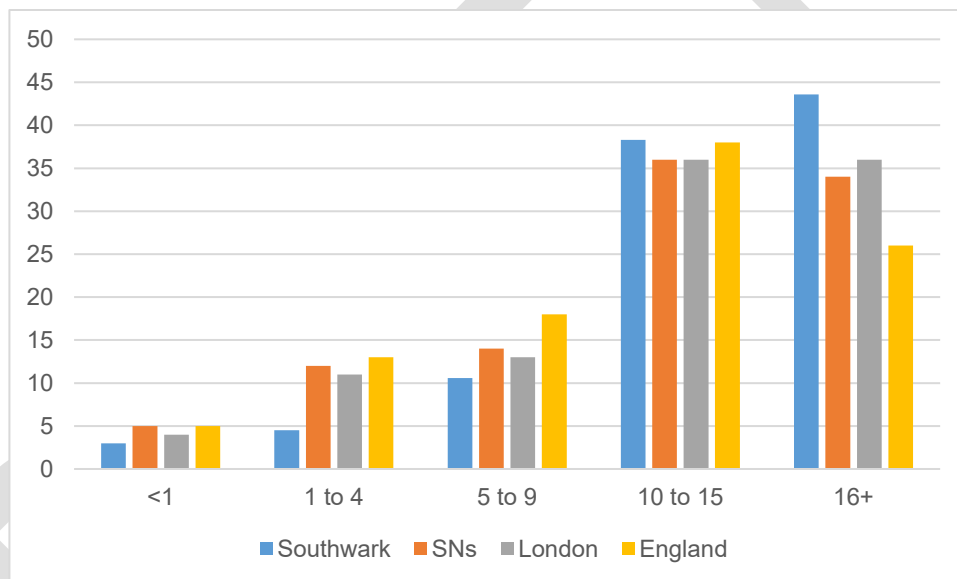
We have lots of different interests including making films, photography, public speaking, performing arts and science however we all have in common an interest in raising the voices of our young people and bringing our children in care community together. We all agree that children in care and young people with care experience need support, so they know who they are and are empowered to have high ambitions in life.

Over 2023/24 we have been involved in many different opportunities. We have supported the development of a new children's home including the design of the home, creating the children's guide, name of the home and recruiting the staff/managers/head of the home who will all work there. We have been to cookery classes, a celebration event, a barbecue and have been a part of many different recruitment panels. We were invited to talk at a meeting that involved all the directors at Southwark Council; raising awareness about the issues young people face and asking for their support to improve the experiences of our young people. Whatever we do, we are always representing the lived experiences of children in care and care leavers and making sure that our voices are heard to influence how the council delivers services to us.

## Who are the children in our care?

At the end of March 2024 there were 397 children in our care, 5% less than in April 2023. We have a lower rate of children in care (68 per 10,000) than nationally (70 per 10,000), but this remains higher than the average rate across London (51 per 10,000). 55 (14%) of the children in our care are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children which is higher than the national average (7%) and London average (11%).

Children who have come into our care from families in Southwark are almost evenly split between male and female, with 1% of children identifying as trans or non-binary. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are 93% male and 7% female. Adolescents represent over 80% of the children in our care which is higher than our statutory neighbours, London and national peers.



**Figure 1: percentage children in care by age as of 31<sup>st</sup> March, DfE SSDA903**

More children in our care are from black or black British (39%) backgrounds, than white (25%) and mixed (23%) backgrounds. The gap is widest for children care aged 10-15, with 47% of this group being from a black or black British background, against 30% from white backgrounds and 20% from mixed backgrounds. Conversely children aged under 10 years old, 31% are from a black or black British background, 32% from a white background and 34% from mixed backgrounds.

Of the 177 children who entered our care in the year the majority (72%) were also adolescents over the age of ten, this reduces to 62% when we exclude unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Overall almost half (47%) of children who entered our care this year were over 16.

## Who are our care leavers?

At the end of March 2024, the council was actively supporting 639 care leavers aged 16-25 years old. This is a rate of 187 care leavers per 10,000 of the population, compared to a London rate of 163 per 10,000. Former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children now make up 29% of our 18–25 year-old care leaver population, which is 167 young people.

During 2023/24, 198 children left our care, almost half (47%) moved into adulthood, and became our care leavers. Approximately a third (34%) of children leaving care returned to the care of their parents or another connected person.

Our young people (other than former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children) from black or black British backgrounds make up 54% of our care leaver population with those from a white background making up 24% and those from mixed backgrounds making up 15%.

94% of our care leavers are in suitable accommodation, with just 22 young people in living arrangements that we do not feel fully meet their needs. This includes 13 young people who are currently in custody.

We saw a slight fall in the percentage of our care leavers who are in education, employment or training in the year, down to 67% from 70% the previous year. However, this continued to far exceed the London average of 56%.

## What is a corporate parent?

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 says that when a child comes into the care of the local authority or is under 25 and was in the care of the local authority for at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday, the authority becomes their corporate parent. This means that they should follow the core 'corporate parenting' principles enshrined in the 2017 legislation to:

- 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 the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
- to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
- for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

As corporate parents, it is every councillor's responsibility to make sure that the council is meeting these duties towards children in care and care leavers.

Corporate parenting means the whole council, its public and private sector partners, taking collective responsibility to achieve the outcomes for our children in care and those who have left out care that we would want for our own children.

Being an excellent corporate parent means we should be tirelessly ambitious for our children and unashamed at using every tool at our disposal to provide for our children, giving them access to opportunities, offering every ounce of support we can to ensure they grow up to live their best lives.

The Lead Member for Children's Services and Director of Children's Services share a statutory responsibility to ensure that *all officers and members of the local authority [act] as effective and caring corporate parents for looked after children, with key roles in improving their educational attainment, providing stable and high-quality placements and proper planning for when they leave care*<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services – April 2013](#)



# Our Corporate Parenting Strategy

In July 2021 the Corporate Parenting Committee agreed *Caring to Care: Achieving Excellence for Our Children*<sup>2</sup> - Southwark's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-2024. The strategy sets out how Southwark intends to deliver on the Corporate Parenting Principles codified in The Children and Social Work Act 2017.

Our Corporate Parenting Strategy delivers on the principles through 6 priorities which are:

1. Supporting More Families to Safely Stay Together
2. Growing Up Safe and Independent in Society
3. Health, Wellbeing, Education & Opportunity
4. Happy, Safe and Stable
5. Identity & Belonging
6. A Whole Borough That 'Cares to Care'

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<sup>2</sup> [Southwark Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-2024 – July 2021](#)

# Supporting more families to safely stay together

## Our commitment

Ensuring all our children & families get the right help at the right time, and at the earliest possible opportunity. To make sure that every child is supported to safely thrive at home. We said we would:

- Continue to invest in evidence-based edge of care services and provision.
- Further increase the rate of children in connected care arrangements, through investment in our Family Group Conferencing and support offers.
- Further develop our re-unification support offer to ensure when children return home, they are able to do so sustainably and that more children are supported to return home.

## How we have delivered

This year we continued to see more children supported to remain at home in the care of their parents. The number of children looked after by the council reduced to 397 at the end of 2023/24, compared to 420 at the end of 2022/23 and 457 at the end of 2021/22. We know that this is not just about reducing numbers of children in the care of the council as the rate of children in our care has come down from 78 per 10,000 of the child population to 68 in the same period.

Decisions for children to come into the council's care are made by Heads of Service, chairing our Legal Panel, or by the Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting, at our Resource Panel, which is specifically for adolescents. These panels provide strong leadership and oversight of decisions for children to enter care and support a multi-disciplinary approach to decision making, which benefits from qualified clinical input to consider any additional support that would help children to remain in their families.

In 2023/24 177 children came into the care of the council, which is a reduction from 182 in 2022/23 and 228 in 2021/22. Similar to the overall number of children in our care the rate of children coming into care in the year has also fallen from 37 per 10,000 in 2021/22 to 31 in 2023/24.

Our robust approach to decision making ensures that we explore all options for the best care arrangements for our children. This has seen a continued upward trend in the percentage of children who we support to live with friends and family, when their parents are no longer able to safely care for them.

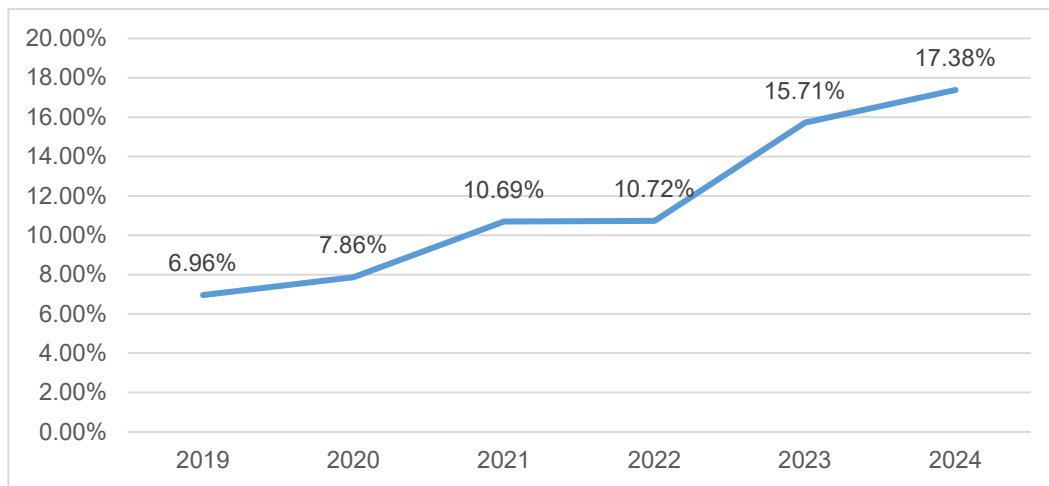


Figure 1: percentage of children in care who are in family and friend placements 2019-2024.

We have maintained our investment in our specialist teams who work with children and families who are most at risk of having to come into our care, like our Keeping Families Together Team who provide intensive intervention and support to ensure the families can stay together and thrive. In 2023/24 we launched a new innovative approach called Southwark Works Intensively with Families Together, or SWIFT, to work with families on the verge of entering into court proceedings for their children to be taken into care.

The SWIFT team focusses on children on child protection plans for long periods of time where previous interventions have been unable to create the right changes for the family. The team has been able to support more than half the families worked with to get to a place where their children came off protection plans and away from the risk of entering care, as well as being able to show a positive impact on 81% of the children in terms of their mental health.

## What we still need to achieve

Whilst the success of our services and partners in supporting more children to remain at home is cause for much positivity, we know there is still more we need to do to ensure that families get the right help at the right time. The reduction in the rate of children in our care remains higher than our peers across London with Southwark having the seventh highest rate across the Capital and the London average being 51 per 10,000, compared to our 68.

The trend in older children making up the majority of those coming into care is continuing (figure 2). Research conducted by the Children’s Commissioner<sup>3</sup> in 2021 found that most children entering care from thirteen had significant vulnerabilities including issues with school such as fixed-term or permanent exclusions and a large proportion had an education, health and care plan. The research emphasises the need for continued investment into earlier intervention and prevention activity across an increasingly joined up partnership system. This means ensuring families are supported to provide the right foundation for their children from the earliest days through to adulthood. The opportunity will be delivered under the Southwark 2030 commitments and principles to improve outcomes for our children and young people in care.

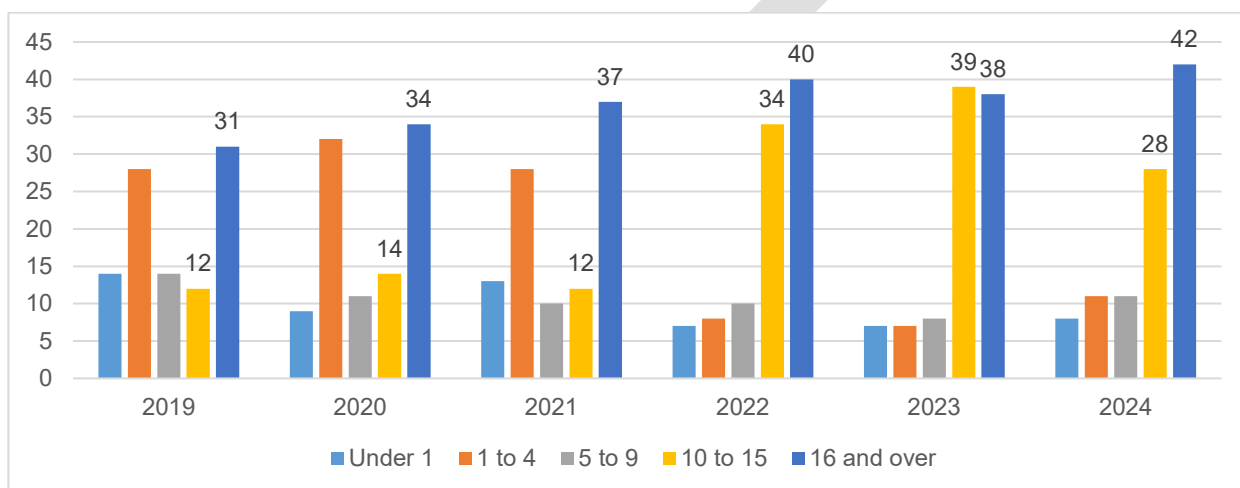


Figure 2: percentage of children entering care by age group.

We know there is more for us to do to support children who do go home from care to stay with their parents and carers. In 2023/24 we saw 37 children come into care for a second or subsequent time, which was 19% of all the children who came into care in the year. Whilst national data tells us roughly 26% of children who go home from care will return into care at some point, we are keen to continue to explore and expand our evidence-based approaches to sustainable reunification and to outperform national averages by an even greater margin.

<sup>3</sup> [The Characteristics of children entering care for the first time as teenagers](#)

# Growing up safe and independent in society

## Our commitment

Giving all of our children the tools, skills, resources and support that they need to grow towards independence and be protected from the threats and risks to them from an increasingly complex world. We said we would:

- Embed transitional safeguarding practice so that care leavers are safeguarded from exploitation and abuse when they turn 18.
- Continue to invest in support for our children to 'stay put' with their carer's when they wish to do so.
- We will work with our Housing teams to ensure our care leavers are given as much help as possible to find not just suitable housing, but housing that is fit for their futures.
- Invest in enhanced life skills programmes for all of our children.
- Work with partners to develop deposit support schemes and savings accounts for our children.

## How we have delivered

Our young people continue to be much more likely than their national peers to be supported to stay living with their foster carers after they turn 18, known as 'staying put.' The percentage of care leavers aged 19-21 in Southwark who are still living with the former foster carers increased again this year. Now at 18%, up from 16% in 2022/23, and compared to the national average of just 9%.

The council's Children's Services and Housing teams are still working closely to continuously improve the local offer and access to suitable accommodation for our care leavers. The percentage of our care leavers living in suitable accommodation increased again to 96%, from 93% the year before. This compares to an average of 88% across England. This reflects our continued ambition for all of our care leavers to live in accommodation that suits their needs and gives them a stable place to call home.

Our Children's Rights Team have provided opportunities over the last year for care leavers to support their transition to independence such as cookery classes and sports activities amongst many other opportunities. These provide engaging sessions for young people to access peer support while learning other life skills.

Our partnership with the Share Foundation is now fully embedded meaning more of our children have secure and industry leading savings accounts ready to support them when they reach adulthood.

The multi-agency support offer provided at our Care Leaver Hub, Talfourd Place, continues to expand. With professionals from a range of disciplines now on hand or providing drop-in sessions for care leavers in a place that belongs to them. The last year has seen new sessions being delivered around issues like substance misuse, employability, mental health support, and colleagues from the Department for Work and Pensions providing on site advice and support on benefits entitlements and access to our care leavers. The Hub also provides an open space for our care leavers to drop-in and get practical support when they need it from the onsite team and their peers on a range of activities like personal care, doing laundry and much more.

## What we still need to achieve

A number of workshops have taken place to continue to strengthen the working relationship between Children's Services and Housing, with many positive results. One outcome of these sessions was the recognised need to develop a stronger joint working protocol to ensure we are meeting our obligations as set out in the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DHLUC) and Department for Education (DfE) good practice guidance for joint housing protocols for care leavers<sup>4</sup> and incorporate the new Pan London Care Leaver Compact<sup>5</sup> pledges on housing. The protocol will be finalised and implemented in 2024/25.

Whilst we have seen a significant increase in the level of high-quality and multi-disciplinary skills and support activity provided to our care leavers in the Hub, we have not yet achieved our ambition to have a truly thriving and lively space that our care leavers can treat as 'their place.' A space where they feel comfortable and able to drop-in whenever it suits them just to be amongst friends and to get whatever small or large support they need. We will be investing, through co-design work with our care leavers to re-decorate the space, increase the accessibility and put in place more facilities for interesting and positive activities, like a new computer suite for homework, gaming and skills development.

Our care leavers have told us that they would like to see a greater availability of local semi-independent accommodation options for them. In the same way we have responded to the voice and needs of our children in care by creating new Children's Homes in Southwark, we will explore the opportunity to better stimulate the market for local semi-independent accommodation and where possible to invest capital funds to develop more provision inside the borough.

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<sup>4</sup> [Good Practice Guidance](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Pan London Care Leaver Compact](#)

# Health, wellbeing, education and opportunity

## Our commitment

Marshalling the unique resources of the borough to ensure that every one of our children and young adults gets the support and advocacy they deserve and expect from an excellent parent. We said we would:

- Set high aspirations for our children, listen to them and develop every possible opportunity for new experiences that match their aspirations and harness their enthusiasm.
- Commit to providing all our children and young adults with the right digital devices and connections so they are not disadvantaged.
- Guarantee access to high quality mental health support for all our children.
- Strengthen the sporting, leisure and cultural offer.
- Deliver a comprehensive educational catch-up offer for our children to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

## How we have delivered

Making sure our children and young people are heard and are driving the development of our local offer is the at the heart of all the work of our services. In 2023/24 we doubled the size of our Children's Rights Officer Team to make sure that we have the right capacity in place to deliver every opportunity to bring our children and young people together to have their voices heard, but also to ensure that the right one-to-one support is available when our it's needed.

The percentage of our care leavers in higher education continued to increase in 2023/24, with 10% of our care leavers now entered in higher education compared to 6% across England and 7% across statistical neighbours. This included a record number of students progressing to university or degree level apprenticeships this year. Our Virtual School has continued to deliver high quality support and advocacy for all our children in care. The Team has in particular, increased their focus on ensuring any of our children placed outside of Southwark are supported where necessary to get a new local school place quickly, and where this is not possible for them, that the receive high quality professional tuition in their placement.

Our Care Leavers Hub has worked with our partners at the NEST to bring high quality on hand mental health support to our children and young people when they need it, through a drop-in clinic and a regular presence in the Hub. Meaning more care leavers can get direct access to advice and guidance, as well as clinical support where they need it to support their mental wellbeing.

The Leisure Service continues to provide free gym and swim access to all children in care and care leavers up to the age of 25. Meaning all our children and young people can keep physically active and access a range of individual and group lessons across Southwark's leisure centres. Services work closely together to better promote the uptake of the leisure offer.

## What we still need to achieve

A major barrier to employability schemes for many of our care leavers is the inability to access apprenticeships due to the levels of minimum qualifications required. We are working across the council and with our anchor partners to develop more alternative routes into employment and for our care leavers, including traineeships, work experience and shadowing opportunities and support to apply for more entry-level positions.

Our children and young people have told us that they really value the free leisure offer available to them. But they often find it difficult and sometimes intimidating having to attend sessions and classes alone. We want to explore more opportunities to ensure our children and young people are able to benefit from the rich offer in Southwark together, with peers, in groups and supported by their non-care experienced peers.

One of the most important parts of supporting our young people to move into adulthood and independence is ensuring they fully understand their health and wellbeing history when they reach 18 and receive continuing support to understand what this means for their health as they grow into adulthood. We know that not enough of our young people receive a detailed Care Leaver Health Summary when they reach 18 and we need to work better with health services to make sure that not only do our young receive all their relevant documents, but that they have the opportunity to discuss and understand their individual history.



## Happy, safe and stable

### Our commitment to children and young people

Making sure that every one of our children has a say in where they live and who they live with. That they are safe and in permanent homes earlier, closer to home, and supported to remain there as long as they need to. We said we would:

- Increase the sufficiency, range and quality of opportunities for our children and our young adults, to ensure more are able to live within and close to the Borough.
- Listen more to our children and change how we all speak and think about them.
- Continue to invest in the support offer for our children and carers, through our clinical services and other partners.
- Provide an enhanced training offer to our carers and increase the availability of therapeutic carers.

### How we have delivered

We have completed the capital programme to develop and open the first council run Children's Home in Southwark for over 20 years. The new state-of-the-art, climate-friendly home will mean more of our children are supported to remain living in the borough, close to their networks, communities and the people who mean the most to them. The views of young people have been at the centre of every aspect of the development of the home. From designing the layout of the home, selecting the decoration and furniture, to staff recruitment and most recently choosing a new name for the home.

Our Clinical Service continues to provide a strong offer of support and interventions for children, young people and their families. We have increased the number of qualified Clinicians working directly with our children in care and care leavers, particularly to provide more outreach to care leavers living outside of Southwark. We have also appointed a specialist Senior Clinical Practitioner dedicated solely to working within our new children's homes and provide valuable support for children who live there and the staff supporting them.

We have refreshed our marketing assets for recruiting new foster carers to the service and we are utilising the power of social media to advertise these and increase the numbers of people wanting to become foster carers with the council. While we are still in the early phases of developing this strategy we are seeing increased engagement on our social media channels.

## What we still need to achieve

The capital works on our second new Children's Home begin in November 2024 and is scheduled to open in late Autumn 2025. Meaning even more of our children in care will be able to live in local council run homes. We know we can mobilise more assets to develop local provision for our young adults and will continue to campaign for more affordable independent housing opportunities for our care leavers.

With the increasing cost of living pressures and demographic changes in Southwark, the traditional pipeline of foster carers and carer accommodation is increasingly squeezed. We will keep exploring innovation in foster care to offer new pathways into caring, and work with our existing carers to explore new opportunities to maximise their capacity to care for more children. This includes expanding the ability of our carers to care for more complex children by providing dedicated and out of hours therapeutic support to carers. We will also work to develop more caring communities working with our previous kinship carers to encourage them to care for more children outside their family groups.

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# Identity and belonging

## Our commitment

Giving all our children and young people the chance to learn about themselves, their history and identity, and to live with carers who understand and reflect their cultural identity. Providing every chance for our children to appropriately engage with their own families and personal history. We said we would:

- Provide enhanced opportunities for children to 'Re-Connect' with their families, family networks and important people in their lives.
- Review our assessment, learning and development for foster carers about the needs of black young people in care.
- Address disproportionality in our carer population and bring more young people back to live in our Borough, and with their communities.
- Deliver a mandatory education program for workers and managers about racism, anti-discriminatory practice, black history, and inequality.
- Improve our equality data collection and monitoring, address the gaps and understand why certain groups are overrepresented in care.
- Ensure that life story work is completed with our children and young people.

## How we have delivered

We were successful in our bid to secure nearly £0.5m in additional grant funding from the Department for Education to increase our 're-connect' offer to care experienced young adults. Our Lifelong Links programme has funded a dedicated new team focused on supported our young people to identify and re-connect to the important people in their lives, build stronger community connections, reduce loneliness and support them to understand themselves, their culture and identity better. Nearly 100 people, including over 40 care experienced young people, attended our launch event.

In March 2024, we became one of the first councils to sign the immigration support pledge for children in care and care leavers. This means that children in care with immigration and nationality issues will be connected with good quality legal advice and we will take a proactive and informed role in supporting children in care and care leavers to enable them to resolve these issues. This has involved creating new ways to track and monitor the immigration status of our children and young people to ensure we are doing our best as corporate parents to support the resolution of these.

Over 2024, the department recruited to a dedicated permanency lead post in the Corporate Parenting service. This worker has been focused on embedding process and good practice in life-story work within the 0-15 care service to enable children in care to understand more about their journeys into and in care, where they have lived and who with and to understand their families and who they are.

As part of our work to embed anti-racist practice and tackle disproportionality we delivered a weeklong learning and development programme - 'LearningFest' - for all Children's Services staff. The programme included nearly 20 intensive practice development and learning seminars across a range of topics such as the: Adulthood of Black Children; Disproportionality Data Analysis; Anti-Racism and Psychological Safety in the workplace; Community Engagement and the Police. Seminars were led by local and national leaders in tackling discrimination in service delivery, as well as our own Children in Care Council leading a session on Identity.

Children in care, care leavers and foster carers are considered as part of our departmental action plan for the council wide programme Southwark Stands Together tackling discrimination. Data relating to disproportionality is routinely collected and analysed across the service to consider service delivery to children, young people and carers. Our colleagues in the Virtual School are also providing materials and resources to help our children and young people celebrate Black History Month.

## **What we still need to achieve**

We see outstanding examples of work to help children in care and care leavers to understand their life story, with many of our staff using innovative and collaborative approaches to helping children understand their personal history in a meaningful way that is individual to them. This includes helping young people to design and describe their life story in a range of creative ways for example using visual arts and creative writing. But we know that the consistency of this work is not yet what it needs to be, and we will take a whole system approach to our life story work so that everyone has a detailed history from the first contact onwards.

Proactively seeking permanence for children in care remains a council priority. We have been seeking views from special guardians about the support they receive and how we could improve this. We will strengthen our offer for special guardians to increase this permanence option for children in care.

# A whole borough that 'cares to care'

## Our commitment

Placing delivering for our children and young adults at the heart of everything the council and its partners do. Broadening the voice and experience of our children across all decision making and making Southwark a truly Corporate Parenting Borough. We said we would:

- Review the council's commissioning, planning and licensing arrangements to leverage Social Capital for our children and young adults.
- Establish a shadow Children & Young People's Cabinet to hold the whole council to account to include young people with experience of care.
- Work with our children and young people to develop their own version of this strategy and develop a new pledge.
- Develop a corporate parenting champions network across the council and our key partners.
- Challenge all the major organisations in the Borough to adopt the corporate parenting principles and deliver on a promise to our children.
- Improve how we listen to our children and young adults and embed them and their views in our service improvement activity at every stage.

## How we have delivered

Southwark Youth Parliament is now well established and has good links with our children in care council – Speakerbox. Our Youth Parliament and Speakerbox representatives regularly attend a range of groups, forums and council committees to ensure the voice of children and young people is central to the council's deliberations and decisions. Speakerbox have also presented to the council's Directors Forum, with commitments from across the council to improving the corporate parenting offer across the system.

The Staff Expo in the winter of 2023 had representatives from our care experienced community speaking to staff and leaders from across the council about the needs and ambitions of children in care and care leavers. A range of corporate parenting pledges of support were made and have provided a range of new opportunities for care leavers, including career conversations and skills workshops.

Our children and young people regularly co-produce child-friendly versions of our key strategies, documents and reports, that help us to inform and empower their peers to understand the work we are doing to help and support them and strengthen the opportunity for them to challenge and hold us to account for the success of our delivery.

Leaders across the council are increasingly working to break down barriers to improving the one council corporate parenting offer. The Customer Contact Centre helped model how to support employability opportunities for care leavers, by holding targeted information and advice sessions for care leaver applications, and ring-fencing employment opportunities. Resulting in five care leavers joining the team.

We have established a new Innovation Group with children, young people, parents and carers, working alongside staff to explore ideas big and small that can help improve our system and the offer to our care experienced community. The group meets quarterly to present and discuss their ideas for the development of services.

## **What we still need to achieve**

Following on from the publication of the Southwark 2030 Strategy we will launch work with our care experienced children and young people to design the new Corporate Parenting Strategy 2025 – 2030. This will be developed in full collaboration with our children and young people ensuring their voice, lived experience and ambitions are at the heart of the next phase of our whole partnership corporate parenting delivery.

We want to mobilise more support across the council to expand the corporate parenting offer and create more awareness of the opportunities to support our children and young people at all levels of the organisation. We will further develop our network of corporate parenting champions across council departments and develop a new training offer for any staff who would like to volunteer their time, experience and expertise so that people have a better understanding of the needs of our children and young people so that we can provide a stronger and more sustainable support offer.

We are creating more job roles specifically for care experienced young people such as Young Inspectors supporting the development and embedding of a new quality assurance approach for placements of children in care.

# The work of the Corporate Parenting Committee

The Corporate Parenting Committee is a cross-party committee, chaired by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Refugees. The committee meets on a quarterly basis to fulfil its role to secure real and sustained improvements in the life chances of children in care and our care leavers.

The committee champions the voice and experience of children in care and care leavers, and has active representation from Speakerbox at all meetings, both to present the views of our children and young people and to scrutinize and join discussions on the decision making and reporting to the committee. Young people's representation at the committee is broad and mirrors the care and care leaver population, ensuring a range of views and experiences are present in discussions.

The committee takes a thematic approach to in depth review of key issues impacting on the life chances of care experienced children and young people.

## Housing

Representatives of the council's Housing Services regularly attend the committee to provide updates on the cross-council work to improve the accommodation support offer for children in care and care leavers. The committee heard of the competing demands placed on the council's housing services with high demand and increasing pressure on housing supply within the Borough. But recognised that supporting care leavers is a continuing priority for the services.

The committee heard of the work done to amend the council's Housing Allocation Scheme including changes to promote easier access to housing for care leavers, and about the development of the Pan-London Care Leaver's Housing Compact. Young people were invited by the committee to join workshops and groups taking forward the work to review the allocation scheme and compact.

The committee heard from the young people's steering group about their group's priorities for better housing, which included the desire for more support to find move-on accommodation as young people are approaching 25, and help with more general lifestyle skills for housekeeping, like gardening and home maintenance.

## Health

The committee regularly scrutinises the provision of health and wellbeing support for our children and young people. Young people and committee members hold providers to account to ensure they recognise the unique challenges for children in care and care leavers.

Young people have spoken to the committee about particular issues that they wanted to see greater emphasis from health services in supporting them. Young people were keen for more recognition of additional needs and neurodiversity amongst the care experienced population, and they talked to the committee about their concerns about substance abuse and wider determinants of wellbeing.

The committee has taken a particular focus on mental health of both children in care and care leavers but also the carers who support our children and young people. The committee convened a specific working group to look at the issues impacting on the mental health of children subject to special guardianship orders (SGOs) and their families. The committee secured the agreement of partnership services to make better efforts to recognise children on SGOs as care experienced children and young people and to explore opportunities to fund additional support to meet their needs.

The Designated Doctor for Looked After Children, the Designated Nurse for Safeguarding and the Virtual Mental Health Lead for Looked After Children report regularly to the committee and provide an annual report of the Integrated Care System's (ICS) delivery of services to children in care and care leavers. The committee highlighted the strengths in ensuring that where services are having challenges in meeting the needs of care experienced individuals or delays in care are likely, these are escalated promptly and to the most senior levels within the ICS to ensure solutions are found. The committee heard of the continuing issues in ensuring equity of support for those in care placements outside of Southwark and agreed to focus its scrutiny on how to take forward improvement in this area.



## Education and employment

The committee monitors the education and employment outcomes for children in care and care leavers through the work of the Virtual School for Looked After Children and the Experienced Practitioners in the 16+ service.

The committee receives the Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher which gives oversight of the educational achievement of all children in care and care leavers, including the barriers to success in education for them. The committee's oversight has driven improvements in the use of new digital solutions for children's Personal Education Plan (PEP), that now allow much stronger multi-agency collaboration in planning for individual children's education. As a result of this, PEP completion timeliness reached 100% in the spring term and audits of these plans showed high quality educational planning for children in care.

The committee heard and placed a particular focus on the support provided to children with additional needs, noting that 43% of children in our care have an identified special educational need, compared to 12% of their non looked after peers. As well as the use of the over £830k of Pupil Premium grant that is received annually to specifically promote the education of school aged children in care.

The committee has also focused on challenging persistent absenteeism for children in care and exploring opportunities to better support our children to access and remain in education. The committee has challenged services to focus more closely on the intersectional needs for our children in care, such as the over prevalence of special educational needs, societal inequalities, and accessing services when placed outside of Southwark; and to ensure that work is focusing on reducing inequity in educational access.

## Placements and permanence

The committee has responsibility for oversight over the council's sufficiency strategy to ensure that all our children have the opportunity to live in placements that meet their needs in a place that allows them to maintain links to their families, friends, education and wider societal connections. This includes taking a broader view on whether services are sufficiently championing alternative routes to permanent and stable care for all our children.

On this basis the committee has taken a particularly focused look at the delivery of special guardianship and kinship care arrangements in Southwark, and how services are supporting more children to leave care by moving into these arrangements. The committee challenged services to develop a developmental plan to improve the uptake of these alternative care arrangements over the next municipal year.

The committee has given regular and robust scrutiny on the programme to increase the number and variety of local care placements. This has included regular oversight of the plans to develop and open new council-run Children's Homes in Southwark and the development of new resources to promote in-house foster care.

## Quality of practice and services

As well as scrutinising the main themes and issues affecting children in care and care leavers the committee plays a vital role in overseeing the effectiveness of service delivery to our children and young people.

The committee has responsibility for reviewing the outcome of regulatory inspections of Children's Services and monitoring the delivery of action planning in response to inspection. The committee received a report following the Ofsted Focused visit into Care Leavers and agreed to receive further reporting on the delivery of areas highlighted for improvement in that visit.

The committee recognised the particular vulnerabilities faced by our unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and agreed to sign the *immigration support pledge* drafted in partnership between the South London Refugee Association and Coram Children's Legal Centre. Committing the council to four key pledges to support children with immigration and nationality issues.

The Annual IRO Report was received by the Committee in April 2024, and this set out the performance of services in meeting our key service obligations. The committee was provided with the details on the work of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service whose role it is to provide independent scrutiny of services delivered to children in care and ensure our care services are properly meeting the needs of individual children and the whole cohort of children in our care. This includes key performance measures around care planning for children in care and the scrutiny of these. The report also outlines how IRO's ensure that the voices of children and young people are at the heart of their care plans and that their unique experiences and journeys are captured in documents about them.

## Celebrating the voice of children and young people together

We continue to be proud of how we purposefully and meaningfully engage with children and young people. We ensure that the voices of children and young people are heard individually in their care plans and strategically with our senior leaders. We prioritise participation in all aspects of service improvement work ensuring that our priorities for development meet the needs of our children and young people.

We have been recruiting for staff within our first children's home and all positions have included a young people's panel that comprised young people with care experience. Young people have then been encouraged to share their views on candidate's suitability to work in the home with the management panel to ensure a good breadth of successful candidates.

Our two Children's Rights Officers (CROs) have continued to support children in care and care leavers through the group Speakerbox to engage, participate and share their views with senior leaders and the committee to ensure that their voices contribute to senior leadership strategic activity and decision making.

In November 2023 we held our children in care celebration event at the James Allen's Girls' School in East Dulwich. This event celebrates the achievements of our children in care and care leavers with award categories such as: music, educational achievements, sport and an outstanding achievement award. The event is organised and sponsored by the care service, the virtual school and draws volunteers from across the service to help organise and run the event. The views of children and young people are integral to the event, and we make sure they have input into the planning and delivery on the night. The event is always well attended by members of the corporate parenting committee, children and young people, carers, social workers and members of the Children's Services leadership team. In 2023, the Mayor of Southwark and the Chief Executive of the council also attended the event and gave out awards.

In December we held a winter ball for our children in care and care leavers to provide a more child focused event. This organised by the CROs and supported by a large number of volunteers from across the department. This was an amazing night that was attended by all ages of children in care and care leavers and there was a number of fun activities and games led by staff. Feedback from our children shows how much they enjoy these events and opportunities to meet and socialise with other children and young people.

In January 2024, Children's Services held a stand at the staff expo to talk to members of staff about corporate parenting duties and responsibilities. This was followed in March 2024 with two members of staff from Children's Services presenting at the Chief Executive's all staff briefing on the council's duties and responsibilities relating to corporate parenting. The presentation was well received by staff from all parts of the council and shows the depth of will to work together to improve life-chances for children in care and care leavers. This presentation was swiftly followed with a SpeakerBox 'take-over' of the Directors forum where children and young people had an opportunity to talk to senior officers in the council about their experiences in care and beyond. Children's Services have had pledges from across the council and we plan to formalise an approach to harnessing the amazing pledges of time and expertise into a programme of support for our children in care over 2024/25.

## Our priorities for 2024/25

Our 2021 to 2024 corporate parenting strategy is in the process of being refreshed and we are looking to be bold and ambitious in our plans to develop services for children in care and care leavers for our 2025 to 2030 strategy. Over 2025 to 2030, in-line with the Southwark 2030 strategy, we will be focusing on the best start in life for children in care. Our priorities include:

- Improving the sufficiency of homes in Southwark
- Embedding the use of the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths assessment
- Streamlining service delivery to children in care and care leavers ensuring that the resources we have are utilised to their maximum efficiency to impact positively long-term outcomes for children in care.
- Have focus on tackling the underlying reasons for placement breakdown and instability for children in care with the aim of improving the resilience of placements.

These will be achieved by:

- Increasing the number of residential placements in the borough by opening a second children's home
- Undertaking an in-depth needs and demand analysis of children and young people living in semi-independent supported accommodation to better understand if placement demand meets need in the local area.
- Going further to embed our corporate parenting duties across the council to include creating new pathways into employment and work experience both inside and outside the council.

- Increasing the support available to children and their families who are on the edge of care to prevent any further escalation that may require the children to be accommodated in-line with the pledge to invest in prevention in the Southwark 2030 strategy.
- Equipping our foster carers to care for our children and young people by investing in services and recruitment to both provide high levels of support and increase the number of fostering households available to foster.
- Embedding a detailed quality assurance framework for all placements of children in care that are robustly monitored offering partnership improvement work between providers and the local authority.
- Making sure our children in care are able to succeed in their chosen careers by increasing opportunities for work-based training and work skills.
- Assessing the reasons for high rates of persistent absence across school age children in care and creating a detailed action plan to address these.

DRAFT

<b>Meeting Name:</b>	Corporate Parenting Committee
<b>Date:</b>	11 November 2024
<b>Report title:</b>	Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Annual Report 2023-24
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>	All
<b>Classification:</b>	Open
<b>Reason for lateness (if applicable):</b>	N/a
<b>From:</b>	Alasdair Smith, Director of Children's Services

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. That the Corporate Parenting Committee note the Independent Review Officers (IRO) Annual Report 2023-24.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

2. The IRO Annual Report provides relating to the Independent Reviewing Service for children and young people in care within the local authority, as required by statutory guidance arising from the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010.
3. This report contains a summary of work completed by Southwark's IRO service for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. It identifies the work of the service in fulfilling its statutory remit and highlights areas for development in relation to the IRO function.
4. The report is to be presented to the strategic Director of Children's and Adults' Services, the Lead Cabinet Member for Children, Young People, Education and Refugees and to the Corporate Parenting Committee.

### **KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

5. Independent Reviewing Officers are dedicated to improving outcomes for children and young people in care through the review and challenge aspect of their role. They are often the stable and constant factor for children and young people in care and are committed to driving and improving outcomes for them through working in partnership with young

people, their carers and the social work and professional network around children.

6. In the Ofsted Inspection of 2017 the oversight was an area that was felt to need development. Previous Focused Visits from Ofsted have shown that this area had improved and is continually improving. The OFSTED inspection of September 2022 in particular noted really good practice by the IRO service. In considering the IRO report the Corporate Parenting Committee is able to exercise its own scrutiny and challenge function and hold services to account.
7. The report set out in Appendix 1, highlights the work of the service and the areas for development going forward and provides an overview of children in care and services provided to them.

### **Policy framework implications**

8. The Borough Plan has a commitment to a great start in life for all children and young people in the borough. This particularly has in mind those who are in care, for whom Independent Reviewing Officers are a key part of overseeing the Borough Plan commitment.

### **Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts**

#### **Community impact statement**

9. The decision to note this report has been judged to have no or a very small impact on local people and communities.
10. The work of the IROs is intended to improve the outcome for children and young people in care.
11. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, lays out the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which requires public bodies to consider all individuals when carrying out their day to day work – in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees. It requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. The council's [Approach to Equality](#) commits the council to ensuring that equality is an integral part of our day to day business.
12. The Council's Children and Families Directorate involves working closely with all relevant stakeholders and partners across the sector and collectively we are committed to upholding the responsibilities towards advocating the Public Sector Equality Duty and complying with the Equalities Act 2010.
13. The PSED enables public bodies to consider the diverse needs of groups and have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance



equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. Due regard is about considering the different needs of protected characteristics in relation to the three parts of the duty.

14. The Equalities Act 2010 define the following as protected characteristics; age; disability, gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

#### **Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement**

15. The report takes account of the ethnicity, age, and disabilities of children in care, as well as the racial and ethnic background of current staffing of the IRO Service and addresses these areas in light of commitments set out by Southwark Stands Together (SST).

#### **Health impact statement**

16. The report takes account of the health and wellbeing of children in care.

#### **Climate change implications**

17. None.

#### **Resource implications**

18. None

#### **Legal implications**

19. None.

#### **Financial implications**

20. None

#### **Consultation**

21. Not applicable.

**BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

<b>Background Papers</b>	<b>Held At</b>	<b>Contact</b>
Southwark's Approach to Equality	Quality Assurance and Practice Development, Children and Families, Children's and Adults' Services 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Children's and Adults' Services Tooley Street 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Tendai Murowe 020 7525 0654
<a href="https://www.southwark.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/equality-and-diversity/equality-objectives">https://www.southwark.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/equality-and-diversity/equality-objectives</a>		
Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010	Quality Assurance and Practice Development, Children and Families, Children's and Adults' Services 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Children's and Adults' Services Tooley Street 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Tendai Murowe 020 7525 0654
<a href="https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/959/contents/2013-07-01">https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/959/contents/2013-07-01</a>		
Southwark's Borough Plan 2022-26	Quality Assurance and Practice Development, Children and Families, Children's and Adults' Services 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Children's and Adults' Services Tooley Street 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Tendai Murowe 020 7525 0654
<a href="#">Fairer, greener, safer – Southwark Council Delivery Plan 2022 – 2026</a>		

**APPENDICES**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Title</b>
Appendix 1	Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Annual Report 2023-24

**AUDIT TRAIL**

<b>Lead Officer</b>	Alasdair Smith, Director of Children's Services	
<b>Report Author</b>	Clare Ryan, Service Manager, Quality Assurance and Practice Development	
<b>Version</b>	Final	
<b>Dated</b>	30 October 2024	
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No	
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments Included</b>
Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance	No	No
Strategic Director of Resources	No	No
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	No	No
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>		30 October 2024

# Annual Report

## Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service 2023/24

London Borough of Southwark Children and  
Families Services

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## Introduction

The purpose of this annual report is to provide an overview of the activity of the Independent Reviewing Service for Looked After Children between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024. This report is required by statutory guidance (see 1.3 below and 7.11 of the IRO Handbook, 2010) and seeks to analyse and evaluate practice, plans and arrangements for looked after children. The report is also intended to review the effectiveness of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service in ensuring that the Local Authority discharges its statutory and corporate parenting responsibilities well towards those children who are looked after.

This annual report provides qualitative and quantitative information about the service provided in 2023/24, and also sets-out the priorities for 2024/25 to further improve the effectiveness of the service.

## Legal Context and Purpose of Service

The Independent Reviewing Officers Service is set within the framework of the IRO Handbook (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010) and reflects statutory regulation, the Care Planning Regulations and Guidance which were introduced in April 2010.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) have a critical and statutory role in relation to the improvement of care planning for looked after children. The responsibility of the IRO is to have an overview of the child's care planning arrangements and of the child's wellbeing and where they are living. IROs achieve this primarily through chairing multi-agency reviews of children's care plans and will have a strong focus on plans for children's futures, as well as oversight of the child's health and education. The IRO must offer constructive and targeted scrutiny and challenge regarding case management and care planning through regular review and monitoring and follow up between children's reviews as appropriate to the child's needs and circumstances.

## Functions & Duties of the IRO Service

The primary task of the IRO is to ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's current needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's legal responsibilities towards the child. The IRO Service must have strong oversight of all care planning for children and young people throughout their time experiencing care services, notably at the key transition points where children and young people are entering and leaving care. This is in order to ensure that children and young people's needs are well identified and defined, and that the planning of service delivery is proportionate, impactful and effective in a positive way, and without delay.

To achieve the above, the IRO Service is expected to:

- Ensure that **the care plan is based on a detailed and up-to-date assessment of the child's needs**, and sets out realistic and effective actions to meet those needs, within an appropriate timescale for the child;
- **Identify any gaps** in the assessment process or provision of services, and notify the corporate parent about the implications of this for the child;
- Ensure that the **child's voice is heard**, their views, wishes and feelings are given full consideration and weight and, as appropriate, the child fully understands their care plan and the implications of any proposed changes to it;
- Ensure that the **child understands how an advocate could help** and that a referral to an advocate is made if necessary;
- **Consult** with and involve the child's parents, as well as other significant adults in the **family and professional networks**;
- Ensure any **safeguarding issues are identified** and addressed;
- **Challenge robustly any drift or delay** in the progress of the child's care plan, or the delivery of services to them;
- Ensure that **formal statutory reviews are held and recorded** within timescales set out by statutory guidance;
- **Monitor the local authority's actions** in between the review meetings, to make sure that progress is being made to achieve the outcomes for the child as set-out in their care plan, and to act on any concerns about drift or delay;
- **Take appropriate action** if the local authority fails to comply with regulations, or is in breach of its duties to the child in any material way, including making a referral to Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (CAFCASS).

## Service Overview



Fig 1

Figure 1 above shows the IRO Service within the wider service structure for Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement. The Service Manager for Quality Assurance (Care) is responsible for the direct line management of the IRO Service provided by IROs and also has management responsibility for the provision of advocacy, independent visitors and children and young people's participation (for those children who are looked after by the local authority or are care leavers).

The Service benefits from close links to Permanency and Care Services (0-15) and 16 plus Service, Safeguarding and Family Support Service, the Virtual School Head and other services within Quality Assurance and auditing services. There is also collaborative work with the Extra Familial Harm Service and with the QA Safeguarding Service (Child Protection Conferencing).

Administrative support is provided by a fulltime administrative officer managed by the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) Administration Manager. IROs are responsible with social workers for arranging looked after review meetings, and also for recording all review meetings. There is administrative capacity for the distribution of care plans and IRO reports to the professional network. Social workers are tasked with sending out consultation documents and sharing plans and IRO reports with children and parents.

The Switham IRO Service now has 7 permanent IRO posts and consists of 6 permanent full time and 2 permanent part time IROs. Over the past 12 months the Service has made use sessional staff whilst we have been recruiting to permanent roles and covering long term sickness absence. The use of sessional IROs ceased in August 2024.

IROs who are male, continue to be unrepresented in the profile of our IRO service, and those of Black or Black British ethnicity are underrepresented, with 3 of the 8 permanent IROs being of Black/Black British ethnicity. IROs consider and promote the specific cultural and identity needs of children and young people through the review of their care plans.



There is a leadership and management offer to all staff in Children's Services with courses for aspiring and existing managers provided as well as a 1:1 coaching offer. We are hoping this will lead to Southwark being in a position where we can 'grow our own' and inspire and upskill current members of staff to step up into IRO positions when they become available.

All IROs have at least five years post-qualifying experience as a social worker and are registered with Social Work England. The majority of IROs have previously held managerial roles in other services and all have had experience within safeguarding services and/or services for looked after children.

Some of Southwark's IROs have known children on their caseloads for almost the whole of their life (children now in their early teens who came into care as very young children, e.g. under 6mths old). Often, IROs are the consistent professionals in children's lives and as such, hold a wealth of knowledge about them. This is particularly important when there are changes in the network around the child or young person.

IROs have access to the clinical service and a Clinical Practitioner co-chairs a bi monthly team meeting with the Quality Assurance Service Manager which focusses on reflective discussions regarding research, practice and dilemmas.

### **Email to IRO from a Foster Carer**

*I want to express my sincere gratitude for all the time and effort you've dedicated to our young person. Your contributions are invaluable, and I truly value the commitment you've shown. Thank you for your continued support and for investing your valuable time in the welfare of looked after children.*

### **Feedback from a parent about an IRO**

*She was my son's IRO for the entirety of his time looked after. Although we didn't always agree on everything, which of course is to be expected, she did an amazing job as his IRO, always pushing for the best. And ensuring that he was paramount in everything.*

*She was a truly exceptional advocate for him and a very effective IRO...She made a real and tangible difference for the better.*

## **Caseloads**

IRO caseloads in Southwark are within those limits recommended in guidance (see 7.13 to 7.15 of the IRO Handbook). The recommended average caseload is between 50 and 70 looked after children. The average caseload an IRO holds in Southwark is approximately 55 to 60 children. The highest currently is 58. The workload for an IRO may also be considered in relation to time taken to travel to placements as well as the complexity of issues for each child. Children and families whose origins are in other countries may need additional time in the care planning and review process to properly explore their cultural needs, as well as additional time for interpretation.

Most reviews take place in person however, some children and young people prefer virtual methods of interaction. If a review takes place virtually there is an expectation that the IRO will visit the child or young person where they live either before or after the review. All children and young people should be visited in person by their IRO a minimum of twice per year in order for their IRO to understand their lived experience and ensure they are living in a suitable home.

## **Multi-agency Liaison & Quality Assurance**

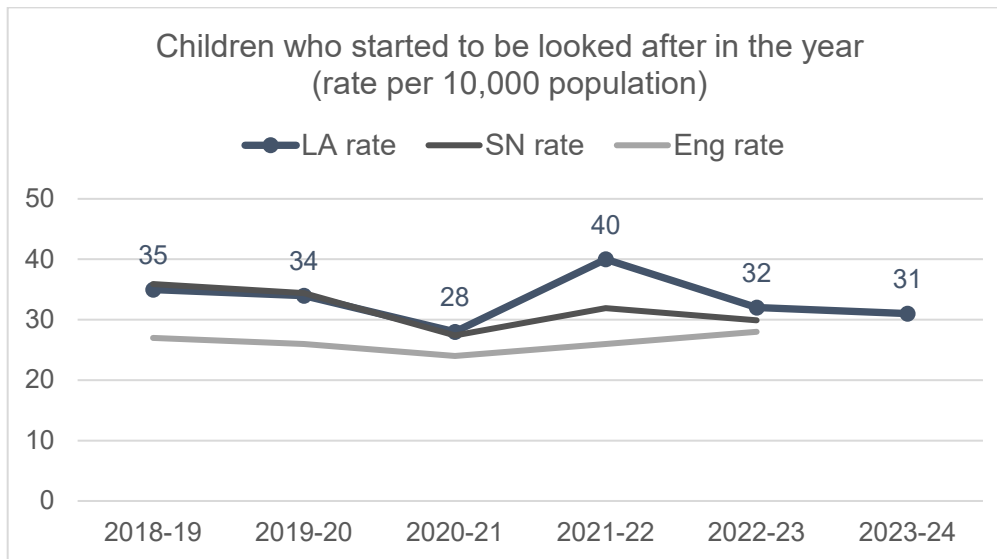
The Service Manager attends a weekly multi-agency meeting which focusses on the timeliness of PEPs, Initial Health Assessments and Review Health Assessments. There is an additional weekly meeting which scrutinises all children and young people in unregulated accommodation and/or subject of Deprivation of Liberty Orders (DoLS).

CAFCASS liaison takes place regularly with quarterly meetings between the Quality Assurance Service Manager, Head of Service for Safeguarding and Family support, Care Proceedings Case Manager and CAFCASS. IROs remain in close contact with Guardians and have electronic access to legal bundles to ensure oversight of children's cases where these are in proceedings.

The IRO Service Manager attends the bi weekly Complex Needs Panel and monthly Permanence Taskforce as well as other strategic meetings.

Southwark hold a quarterly 'Learning Fest'. This is a 1-2 week period which focusses on a practice theme and involves auditing, closing the loop on learning from audit activity and training events which also include young people or adults with lived experience of children's services leading sessions. IROs participate in these quarterly thematic case audits and the Service Manager is involved in the moderation of audits. The Service Manager attends bi monthly performance meetings for the All Age Disability, Safeguarding and Family Support, Care and Permanency and 16+ Service.

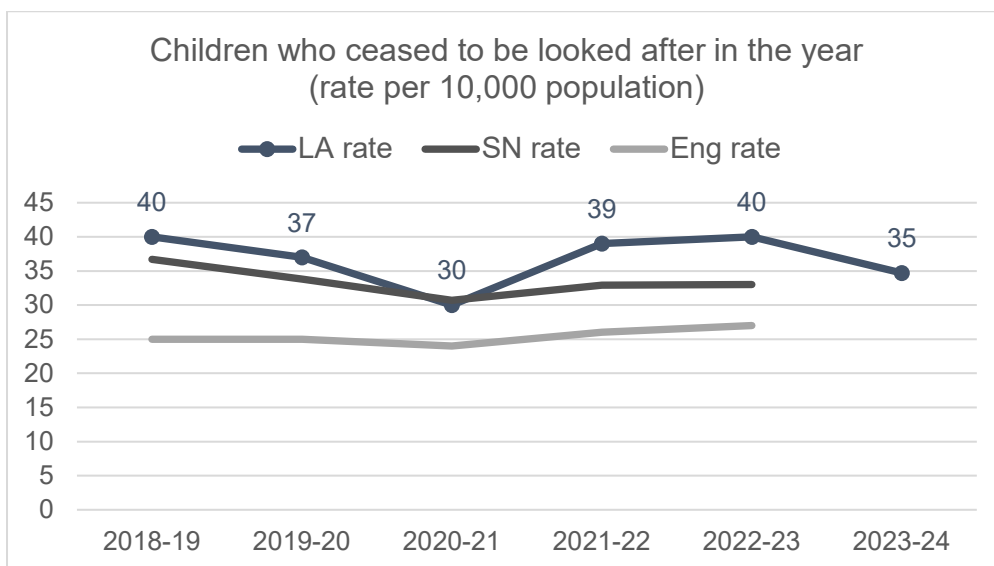
## Profile of Southwark's Children & Young People



Graph1 - Source: SSDA903

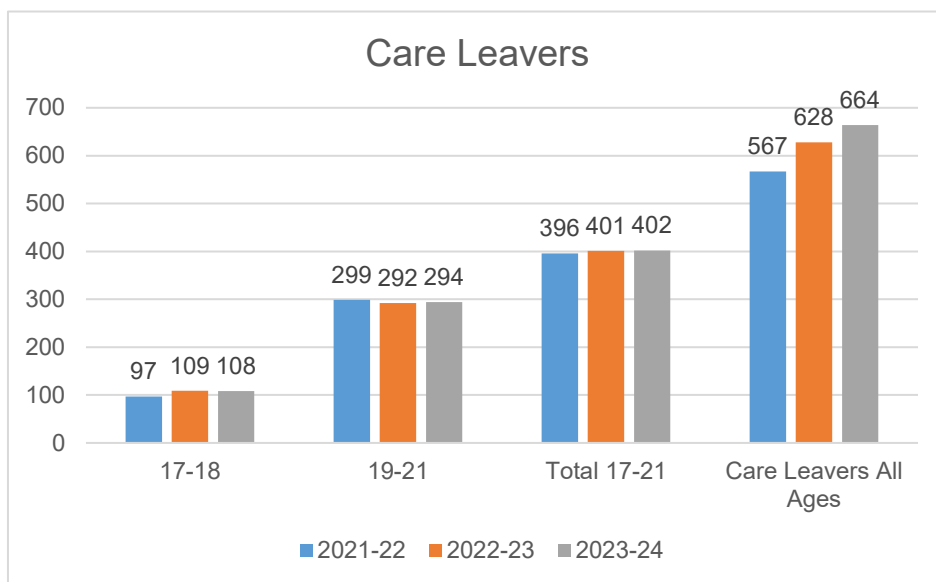
The graph above relates to the rates of children starting to be looked after and compares Southwark's rate of children entering care with our statistical neighbours and the national rate. Southwark's rate has decreased over 2023/24 and is now more in line with our statistical neighbours and the national average.

For IROs, manageable caseloads (as previously evidenced at 1.17) enable improved oversight, allowing time for midway reviews/ongoing monitoring of children and attendance at other key meetings for children (such as Permanency Planning Meetings, Stability Meetings and Professionals Meetings). This then means a greater focus on collaborative working across Southwark's services and with other agencies (schools, primary, community and acute health care, CAMHs etc.)



Graph 2 - Source: SSDA903

The graph above (Graph 2) shows the numbers of children leaving care by year (2018/19 to year end 2023/24). Last year saw a dip in the number of children leaving care (N=198), bringing our rate more in line with that of our statistical neighbours.



Graph 3 - Source: SSDA903 and Internal Performance Data

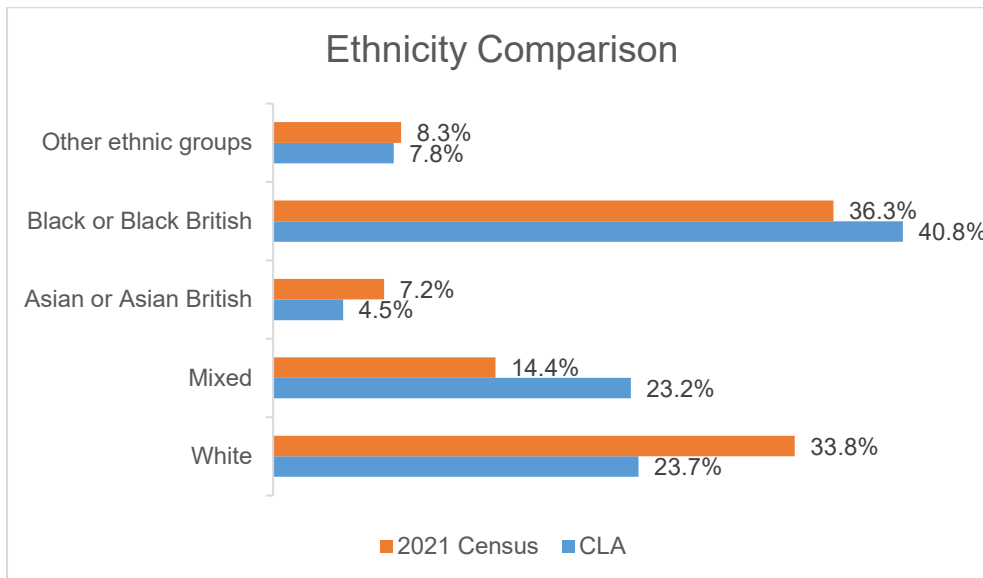
Care leaver numbers have increased, with a 17% increase across the three years shown above (n= 97). IROs have oversight of pathway planning for young people as they approach leaving care age and liaise closely with the 16+ Services. The 16+ Service is in touch with approximately 99.3% of care leavers aged between 19 and 21 years. Audit work has demonstrated that staying in touch and forming trusted relationships for Care Leavers is a particular strength.

<b>No. &amp; Rate of Children Looked After (CLA)</b>	<b>SNs 2022/23</b>	<b>Southwark 2021/22</b>	<b>Southwark 2022/23</b>	<b>Southwark 2023/24</b>
<b>CLA as at 31<sup>st</sup> March (n)</b>	N/A	457	420	397
<b>CLA as at 31<sup>st</sup> March per 10,000</b>	67.1	69	63.7	69.7
<b>CLA starting to 31<sup>st</sup> March (n)</b>	N/A	228	182	177
<b>CLA starting to 31<sup>st</sup> March per 10,000</b>	29.9	40	27.6	31.0
<b>CLA ceasing to 31<sup>st</sup> March (n)</b>	N/A	223	215	198
<b>CLA ceasing to 31<sup>st</sup> March per 10,000</b>	33	39	32.6	34.7

Table 1 - Source: SSDA903

The table above (Table 1) shows children in care as at the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2024 by number and rate as well as the numbers starting and ceasing to be looked after in the year. The table below (Table 2) shows the proportions of children in care by ethnicity.

As noted in the summary, children who are of Black or Black British ethnicity are over represented amongst our children in care (40.8% for 2023/24). 2021 census ethnicity information is used as proxy to show under or over represented ethnic groups. Within the 2021 census Black or Black British as an ethnicity account for 36.3%



Graph 4 - Source: SSSA903 and School Census

The proportion of children who are of White or Asian ethnicity who are looked after by Southwark is lower than our statistical neighbours.

Children by Ethnicity %	SNs 2022/23	Southwark 2022/23	Southwark 2022/23	Southwark 2023/24
<b>White</b>	31	23	22	23.7
<b>Mixed</b>	21	19	21	23.2
<b>Asian or Asian British</b>	9	7	5	4.5
<b>Black or Black British</b>	34	41	43	40.8
<b>Other ethnic groups</b>	6	10	9	7.8

Table 2 - Source: SSSA903

This is significant for the IRO Service. The professional development, and the profile of the IRO Service, should keep pace with the needs and profile of our children and young people. IROs must be well informed of children's cultural needs and monitoring activities and children's reviews must reflect their needs around health, skin and hair care as well as dietary, cultural and identity needs. There has been a recent Learningfest week focused on anti-racist practice and disproportionality which included multiple learning and development events across the week and focused auditing. The audits completed show that there is further development needed in the understanding of intersectionality and anti-racist practice. This will be a focus in the coming year.

Through Southwark Stands Together (SST), the Council has made a commitment to ensuring that Southwark's staffing profile at senior levels is reflective of the local population, and to promote equality and diversity at all levels. Similarly, a commitment is made to make our IRO Service reflective of children and young people's ethnicity, and knowledgeable and responsive to their cultural and emotional needs. Achieving and maintaining a sense of security in care may be more difficult for children and young people of Black, minority ethnic and multiple heritage backgrounds, and for unaccompanied asylum seekers. These children and young people may face racism, discrimination and isolation which can challenge their ability to develop resilience and high self-esteem.

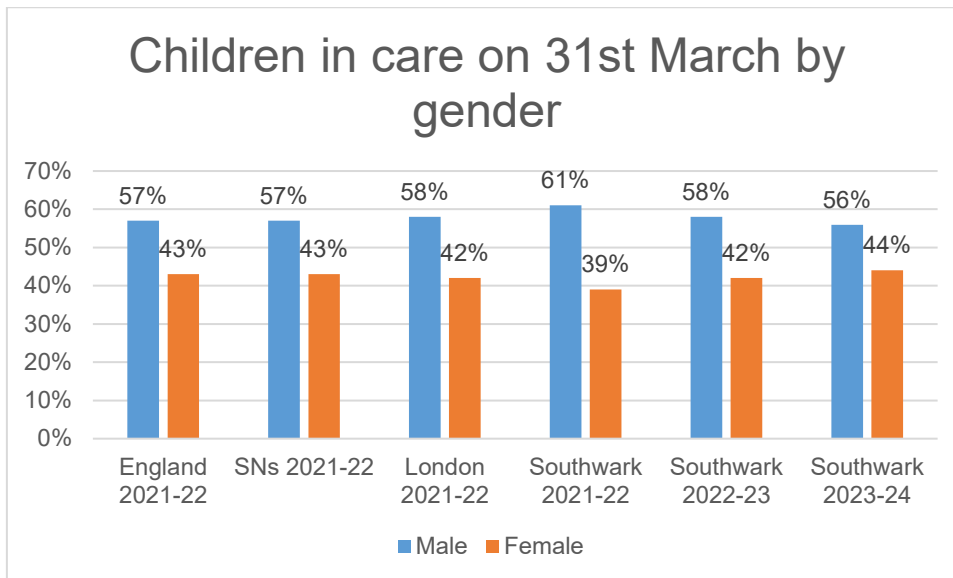
Strategic work is being undertaken to better understand the reasons behind the disproportionality and address the causes.

A bespoke and mandatory training programme was developed and commenced in September 2022 for all social work staff, inclusive of IROs which covered racism, anti-discriminatory practice, black history and reducing inequalities. This programme is currently being reviewed and evaluated and children in care and careleavers have been consulted about the content and suggested changes. There are plans for children in care and careleavers to co-facilitate the training programme in the future. Southwark also run a mandatory inverse mentoring scheme where white senior managers are matched with a Black, Asian or ethnic minority member of staff as their mentor.

Southwark provided funding for 6 careleavers to undertake a mentoring programme. 5 of these young people started the programme but have decided not to continue as they were more interested in coaching and one young person has two more sessions to complete and once qualified will be matched with a senior member of staff to mentor them. It is hoped that this will lead to young people's views being increasingly embedded in strategic decision making about how Southwark works with and supports children in care and careleavers.

The Life Long Links programme has now been established in Southwark. The aim of the programme is to safely support children in care to establish meaningful links with people who are important to them and offer them insight into their history, culture and identity. IROs are working closely with the Life Long Links Team to identify children and young people who would benefit from engaging with the programme.

The graph below (Graph 5) shows the gender of children and young people which remains comparable to statistical neighbours, inner London. As with our statistical neighbours, more male children than female receive care services.



Graph 5 - Source: SSDA903

Southwark's looked after children are proportionately older than our statistical neighbours and the inner London averages. The highest proportion are aged between 16 and over (43.6% at end of 2023/24, compared to 36% for our statistical neighbours).

Strong IRO oversight of care plans for very young children coming into care is crucial if the plan is to return children home where this is assessed as a realistic possibility. Many of our young children's parents and carers are affected by issues such as domestic abuse and violence, substance and alcohol use, and or mental health issues. Often, these issues are not resolved for children and they remain in care, therefore, securing permanency early on by the second reviews for these children becomes critical.

Permanency for children can be achieved in a number of ways. Children can be matched for adoption or matched for long term foster care. Children can also be placed with someone who is connected or related to the child or children (Connected Carers) or via Special Guardianship orders.

Children by age %	England	SNs	London	Southwark 2021/22	Southwark 2022/23	Southwark 2023/24
	<b>Under 1</b>	5%	5%	4%	4.0%	1.9%
<b>1 to 4</b>	20%	16%	13%	15.0%	8.0%	11.1%
<b>5 to 9</b>	12%	8%	8%	10.0%	8.0%	7.6%
<b>10 to 15</b>	14%	14%	14%	17.0%	20.0%	13.6%
<b>16 and over</b>	49%	56%	61%	53.0%	56.0%	65.7%

Table 3 - Source: SSDA903



# Outcomes & Performance

## Stability of Care

IROs have a significant role in supporting children to remain living in a stable home and in ensuring that they have the right support to meet their needs (stability of care). Stability of children remaining where they are living has declined over the last year with two more children experiencing three or more moves (an increase of 0.8 percentage points) compared with the previous year, but remains comparable with other boroughs.

Southwark have recently employed 2 permanent, part time, Permanence Leads who are focusing on looking at how Southwark can increase stability and permanence for children and young people. They are working with the IRO service to ensure IROs have a strong focus on permanence being achieved within the child's timescale and ongoing monitoring. There is a focus on ensuring that regular permanence planning meetings are taking place, that robust and regularly reviewed support plans are in place and children are being matched with foster carers at fostering panel or via the Looked After Review process, if over 14. It appears that changes in social workers and inconsistency of team managers in some services has had a significant effect on permanency planning meetings taking place and children and young people being matched with their carers. There is now greater oversight through the permanence leads chairing tracking panels in each service and a focus on permanency in supervision between the Service Manager and IROs.

Stability meetings need to be happening to support children and young people's carers not just when things are challenging but as a pre-emptive and supportive measure. The Clinical Service have been involved in developing a new stability and support form which focusses more holistically on the young person and carer's needs.

A new Powerbi dashboard has been developed which monitors the stability of young people. IROs now have access to this and it will provide greater oversight of the young people they are reviewing.

Where children were living (by placement type) as at the end of year 2024 is shown in the table below (Table 4). Some comparative information on placement type is unavailable, for example, permanent foster placement information. Southwark's proportion of children in foster care is in line with England at 68%, and a good proportion of placements for children are with permanent foster carers.

Audit work completed with the Care and Permanency Service has shown that children in long term stable placements with committed carers do very well at school and socially.

Southwark is part of the [Commissioning Alliance](#) to support work on sufficiency of placements and developing capacity within and in the proximity of the Borough is a high priority. Southwark are planning to open their own residential provision in 2024 and are also considering opening a semi independent provision, also in Southwark, to open in 2025. Placement sufficiency remains a national issue.

Children by Placement Type	England	SNs	London	Southwark	Southwark
	2022-23	2022-23	2022-23	2022-23	2023-24
Foster placements	68%	74%	72.0%	69.0%	68.5%
Concurrent planning foster placements	-	-	-	-	0.7%
Foster placements with relative(s) or friends(s)	-	-	-	22.8%	23.2%
Foster placements confirmed as permanent (long term)	-	-	-	37.6%	40.8%
Placed for adoption	2%	2%	1%	2.0%	0.5%
Placement with parents	7%	4%	4%	0.7%	0.8%
Other placement in the community	3%	2%	2%	-	-
Children's homes, secure units and hostels	17%	17%	21%	26.0%	23.2%
Other residential settings	2%	3%	3%	2.0%	1.5%
Residential schools	-	0%	-	-	-
Other placements	1%	0%	-	-	5.5%

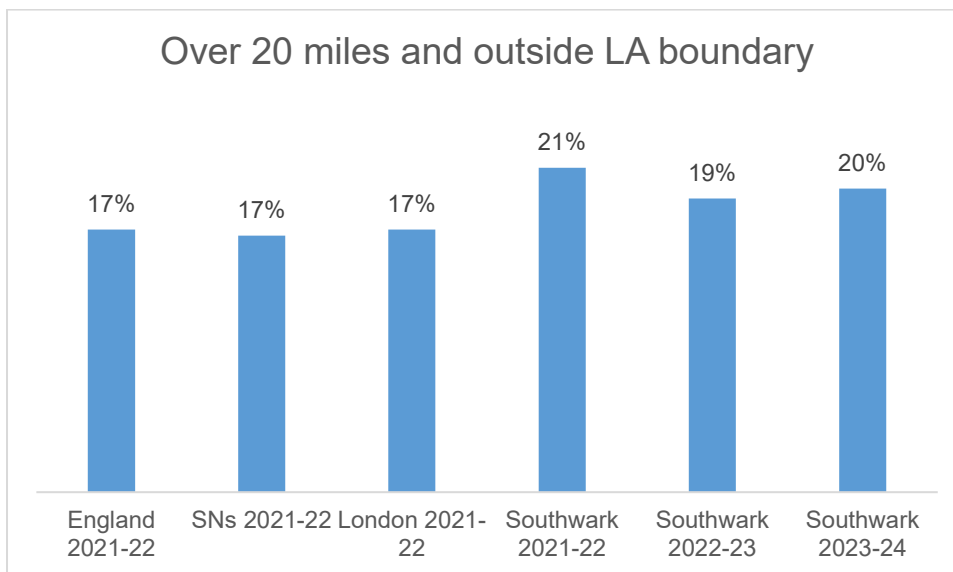
Table 4 - Source: SSSA903

Stability of Care	SNs 2022-23	London 2022-23	Southwark 2022/23	Southwark 2023/24
% of children with 3+ placements	9%	10%	12.0%	13.6%
% of children in care for 2.5 years in placement for 2 years +	71%	69%	64.0%	63.4%

Table 5 - Source: SSDA903

Wherever possible, children and young people should be placed to live close to their families. The graph below (Graph 6) shows the proportion of children in care at the end of the year placed more than 20 miles from their home. For Southwark's children and young people, this is above both the England, inner London and statistical neighbours' average.

It is hoped that through opening a residential home and semi independent accommodation in Southwark in the near future we will be able to meet the needs of more young people within their local community.



Graph 6 - Source: SSDA903

As stated, IROs have a statutory role in seeking to improve outcomes for children in Southwark's care. This includes ensuring that children have an initial health assessment in good time, and that they then have an up to date annual health assessment and developmental checks, and that their mental health and wellbeing is monitored and addressed.

Whilst the majority of children and young people have an up to date annual health assessment (97.5% as at the end of year 2024), the timeliness of initial health assessments requires monitoring. There is a weekly meeting to address this which is chaired by the Assistant Director, the timeliness of initial health assessments continues to increase and is currently at 72%.

Children's access to timely dental checks has been and remains an area significantly impacted

by the pandemic, however performance has increased during the year to 84.4%. The vast majority of children in care have a contemporary SDQ score (73.4%), but these indicators of emotional and behavioural health need should be consistently evident in children's care plans. However, there is embedded clinical capacity (for children's mental health needs) available to Southwark's children as well as a Virtual Mental Health Lead exclusive to children and young people in care.

Audits continue to show that IROs are addressing health assessments in reviews to inform review recommendations. IROs report that they find the Health Summaries incredibly informative and useful when undertaking reviews. SDQ results need to be used more consistently to inform care plans and reviews. Audits indicate that SDQs are completed, but social workers and IROs must relate the findings more explicitly to the child's care plan. Southwark are launching the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessment (CANS). This will sit alongside the SDQ and it is hoped will be a clearer picture of the mental health support and treatment needs of children in care.

<b>Outcomes for Children Looked After</b>	<b>England</b>	<b>SNs</b>	<b>London</b>	<b>Southwark 2022-23</b>	<b>Southwark 2023-24</b>
Number of children whose immunisations were up to date	82%	74%	74%	65.0%	69.1%
Number of children who had their teeth checked by a dentist	76%	74%	76%	76.0%	84.4%
Number of children who had their annual health assessment	89%	91%	91%	98.0%	97.5%
Children looked after for at least 12 months aged 4 to 16 with an SDQ score	75%	82%	82%	85.0%	73.4%
Average score per child	14	14	14	13.5	14.4

Table 6- Source: SSDA903

## Educational Achievement & Attainment

The IRO Service has oversight of Personal Education Plan (PEP) completion and quality as well as children and young people missing education and what is being done to support the young person to remain in education. A PEP should be started within 10 days of a child becoming looked after and their plan must be in place by their first review. In 2022/23 the Virtual School Head Teacher launched the E-PEP which is an electronic document that can be completed online by schools and social workers. This has led to PEPs being undertaken consistently and written up in a timely manner. PEP documents include:

- Strengths and achievements
- Views of the student
- SMART academic targets
- Current and target attainment data

Please see the below table for GCSE School results.

	2020	2021	2022	2023 - 2024
<b>GCSE English Standard, 9-4</b>	32%	27%	47%	40%
<b>GCSE English Strong, 9-5</b>	26%	16%	17%	25%
<b>GCSE Maths Standard, 9-4</b>	13%	27%	17%	16%
<b>GCSE Maths Strong, 9-5</b>	7%	20%	15%	8%

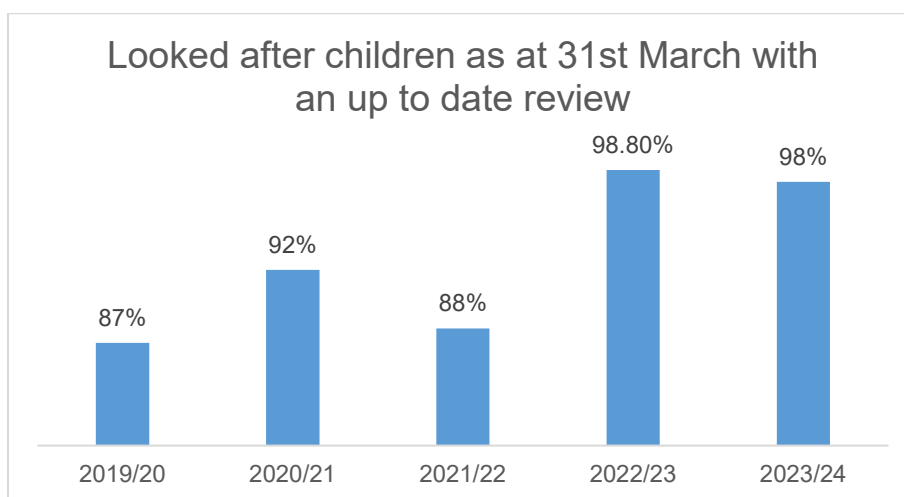
A record 14 students will be progressing onto university undergraduate courses or degree level apprenticeships this year. 1 student will be progressing onto an undergraduate (+ masters) degree level apprenticeship with one of the 'Big 4' leading accounting firms in the world, 9 students will be progressing onto a course at their first choice University and 1 student will be continuing on at their Level 3 apprenticeship with a placement at a manufacturing company.

## Children & Young People's Reviews

A child's initial review should be conducted within 20 working days of the child becoming looked after; and the second review should be conducted within three months of the initial review of the child's care plan. Subsequent reviews should be held not more than six months after this. A review should be held in a venue which is comfortable for the child or young person, usually where the child or young person is living. IROs see children and young people where they live either before the review, as part of the review, or afterwards, depending on the wishes of the child or young person.

The Care Plan and IRO minutes were reviewed in 2022 and all care and pathway plans should now be written in the first person and co-produced with children and young people. The Service Manager along with the Principal Social worker, Children's Rights Officer and a Southwark Care Leaver have been running regular training for social workers to embed this practice. Hearing from someone with lived experience of care planning has been positively received by social workers and is having a significant impact on changing practice to be more child friendly. The IROs are writing their minutes as a letter to the child or young person and this is also now embedded as best practice. The letter to the young person captures the parts of the meeting the young person identifies as being important to them and also focusses on the softer details such as what the young person is interested in, their achievements and what they've been doing. This will form part of a young person's life story work and help them to understand their journey through care and how and why decisions were made, as well as personal details about themselves that may otherwise be lost. Feedback from young people has been positive.

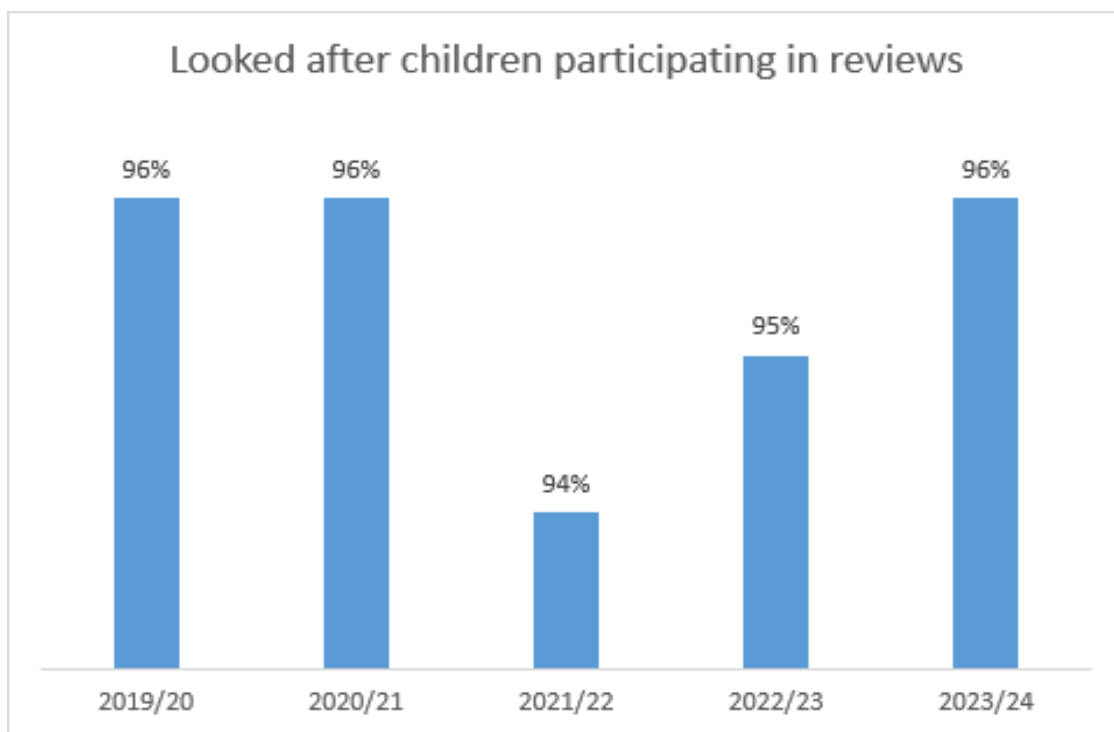
Of the looked after children as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, 98% had an up to date review. This is thought to be as a result of stability within the IRO service and timely notifications when children and young people become looked after. (see Graph 7 and Table 7).



Graph 7- Source: SSDA903

<b>Reviews for Children Looked After</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2022/23</b>	<b>2023/24</b>
<b>No. of children looked after for 20+ working days at 31st March</b>	444	439	408	391
<b>(of the above) No. of children with reviews held in timescale</b>	407	394	403	383
<b>% of children with reviews held in timescale</b>	92	88	98.8	98
<b>Total no. of reviews held in the year for all children &amp; young people</b>	1264	1222	1158	1055

Table 7 - Source: SSDA903



Graph 8 - Source: SSDA903

## Children & Young People's Views

The above graph shows the proportion of children and young people looked after (at the end of year) aged 4 years and above who had participated in their review in some way. There is no published comparative information available for participation. 96% of young people engaged with their review, those that did not tended to be young people who were missing or absent from where they were living or older teenagers. IROs in this situation will continue to reach out and attempt to creatively engage young people but this may be outside the review window and therefore will not be recorded in the statistics. Various methodology is used to encourage children's participation, notably if they do not wish to physically attend their review. Children and young people often meet with their named IRO face to face before their review to give their views. They can also use texting, emailing and online methods to share their views about where they live, their education, their social life and their health care. Some young people have also chosen to use an advocate or their carer to share their views. A website for young people in care and careleavers is in development and this will be an additional medium where they can share their views.

Family time with birth families and carers remains a high priority for children and the frequency



with which they can see their parents and or their siblings. IROs are ensuring that family time plans are being regularly reviewed in terms of the venue and levels of supervision.

IROs will consult with children and young people before, during and after their reviews to hear their views, wishes and feelings and to monitor their needs whilst in care. The Service records consultations via an electronic format which is overseen administratively by the Quality Assurance Service.

Regular consultations take place with Speakerbox to involve children and young people in evaluating practice.

## Children's Rights Officer & Speakerbox

Speakerbox, our Children in Care Council for care experienced young people, is chaired by designated young people supported by the Children's Rights and Participation Officers (CRO) and is divided into Speakerbox Junior and Speakerbox Senior. The Speakerbox mission and purpose is: *empowering, upskilling and equipping our children and young people with the tools to self-advocate whilst amplifying the voices of all our care experienced children and young people.*

As of 25<sup>th</sup> April 2023 there are now two CROs with one post being 50% funded by the Virtual School alongside educational activities for care experienced children and young people. The team was nominated in two categories in the Southwark Staff Awards and they won the Extra Mile Award which was a huge endorsement of the fantastic work they do with children and young people! Speakerbox have also been named as one of the three chosen charities/organisations supported by the Mayor of Southwark which we are very excited about and grateful for.

The work on a Speakerbox Website is now underway and there is a landing page with the content being developed. Young people have been involved in the design of the new Speakerbox Logo and the content for the website. We hope the first phase will be completed by December 2024 and will be a helpful source of information and support for children, young people, carers and professionals.

The Children's Rights Officers have been focusing on Speakerbox becoming a more strategic platform for change with mechanisms for reporting in to the senior leadership team. They have been raising the importance of a Council wide approach to corporate parenting responsibilities and young people recently met with Directors from across the Council and raised their eight key priorities which are housing, finance, education, care, employment, accessibility, opportunities and immigration.

Throughout 2023/24 Speakerbox have continued to shape practice and influence decision making through various means such as developing and delivering training, involvement in Learningfest, recruitment of staff, consultations, attending training workshops, attending events/programmes and campaigning. Over the course of the year there were 1559 episodes where young people participated via Speakerbox, a 55% increase from 1005 episodes the previous year. 78% of these episodes were with young people aged 14-25 years and 22% were under 13 years old.

Children, young people and parents are actively involved in the recruitment of social workers and managers of all levels, there is an expectation that all recruitment will include a panel of young people and parents. Panel chairs and members frequently feed back how much children and young people bring to the process and how insightful they are.

Over the past year children and young people have been continuing to work on their Identity campaign and have also started a campaign called 'Home'. They have created a film about their experiences of being in foster care and this will be used in social worker and foster carer training in the future. Young people have been involved in the recruitment of foster carers and have featured in a social media campaign and film. Young people have worked with a music producer and DJ to record tracks about what 'Home' means to them and a group of Under 13s made a super hero comic.

They were involved in many consultations some of which included the re-commissioning of the advocacy and independent visitor service, input into developing the SEND strategy, developing the young people's guide for Olive House, Southwark's new Residential Home and being consulted about the design of the property and furnishings. They have also engaged in a graffiti workshop and designed and created artwork for Southwark Council buildings and Olive House.

Speakerbox run a fortnightly session called Creative Collective which is an opportunity for care experienced young people to come together to sing and engage in creative activities, facilitated by a singer songwriter and one of extremely talented careleavers.

Young people have grown in confidence and are active participants at every Corporate Parenting Committee. They have raised topics which are important to them such as housing for young people leaving care, finances, opportunities for paid employment and training, mental health support and as a result have influenced plans and services for young people.

One of our Children's Rights Officers has founded the Innovation Project alongside the manager of the Family Council. This is a space where young people, parents and staff from across Children's Services come together to come up with creative solutions to practice issues. There has been a recent focus on understanding financial entitlements.

Speakerbox have been planning activities and events throughout 2023/24 to take place each holiday period to provide new opportunities and experiences for children in care and care leavers. These activities have included a project on identity for different age groups, a film making project, photography project, a football skills programme, and trips to escape rooms, bowling, Thorpe Park and Legoland.

With 2 CROs the next 12 months will focus on Speakerbox continuing to have more strategic influence with the senior leadership team as well as engaging more under 13s, young people with additional needs, young people in custodial and residential settings and young people living out of borough.

## Advocacy and Independent Visitors

IROs signpost all children and young people to advocacy services and are proactive in making referrals and encourage children and young people to make referrals themselves for an advocate if they feel they are not being heard or specific issues are not resolved in a timely or satisfactory way. Social workers and Personal Advisors are also proactive with making referrals or promoting advocacy for children and young people.

The contract with Coram Voice, who were commissioned to provide advocacy and Independent Visiting services to children and young people in Southwark ended on the 30<sup>th</sup> March 2024. There was a big piece of work across 2022/23 to prepare the tender for the new contract. Care experienced young people were closely involved in the process and were invited to participate in a consultation to hear about what was important to them when accessing advocacy and independent visitors. Children's Services staff and the Children's Rights Officers were also involved in sharing their views. This informed the service specifications and young people then developed questions for providers and sat on an interview panel for organisations who had bid for the contract. The advocacy contract is now provided by Barnardos. Coram Voice will retain the Independent Visitor contract until it comes in house to Southwark on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2025.

In respect of advocacy, in 2023/24, Coram Voice provided advocacy to 117 children and young people. This is a reduction by 27 from the previous year. Coram provided 1730.14 hours of advocacy compared to the previous years total of 1956.99. The decrease in hours is partially due to working with less young people as well as a more active approach to monitoring the advocacy hours and the 2 children's rights officers and Service Manager working with the social work teams and advocates to resolve issues more swiftly.

Coram received 78 new referrals and completed 117 closures (ceasing advocacy). In addition, 6 children and young people were provided with advocacy funded by Coram Voice Outreach and Always Heard.

A high proportion of children who have a disability accessed advocacy services in 2023/24. 48.72% of children and young people who used the service throughout the period identified as having a disability. Coram have specialist advocates who are able to provide non instructed advocacy when needed.

Almost half of young people who used advocacy were aged between 12 and 17 years of age, a slightly higher percentage were aged between 18 and 25. Young people living out of borough were higher users of advocacy than those young people in borough, 66 young people vs 45. Black or Black British African young people were the highest users of advocacy followed by White British young people.

The predominant issues raised via advocacy are shown below.

ISSUE	No.
Housing	57
Complaint	47
Concerns about social worker/Personal Advisor	41
Education, training and employment	30
Finance, Benefits and Debt	19
Pathway Planning – request for a plan	15
Other	17

Children and young people were concerned about getting the right support at the right time, particularly with educational and housing needs, complaints and around the level of finances received as well as support to manage these.

More active monitoring of the work done by Coram took place over the past year, and the Service Manager for the IRO Service and Children's Rights Officer has met regularly with Coram and the wider Social Work Services (All Age Disability, Care and 16+) to track children through the process to ensure a more speedy resolution of issues where practicable.

In respect of Independent Visitors, Coram Voice provided 25 children and young people with an independent visiting service with 111 recorded face to face visits between young people and their independent visitors across the year with 382 hours spent with children and young people. Independent Visitors were really thoughtful about activities they undertook with young people, offering them a variety of new experiences such as visiting museums and exhibitions, bike rides, escape rooms, meals out and dog walks. There were a broad range of different age groups accessing the independent visiting service with 4 children aged under 13 years and 16 children aged 14-20 years. 63% of the young people matched a reported to have a disability, have an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) or have mental health needs.

## Feedback from young people about Independent Visitors

*'My IV feels like family, like an auntie almost. It's nice to have someone I can talk to about anything.'*

*'My IV is very funny. I like having him because he gets me out the house.'*

*'My IV gets injured sometimes because he plays rugby, but he always still turns up to see me.'*

## Feedback from foster carers about independent visitors

*'My young person really values their relationship with their IV. They are very good match. Our young person really enjoys the time they spend together and looks forward to each visit.'*

*'They have bonded. The young person was initially hesitant to try new things and go to new places, but this relationship has really warmed up, the young person is more open to new experiences.'*

## Monitoring & Escalation

As stated, IROs have a statutory responsibility to raise concerns about the arrangements or services being provided for and to children and young people, and ensure that Southwark Council addresses issues raised in a prompt manner to prevent delay in service provision or decision making affecting children's care.

IROs generally have good links and relationships with team managers, service managers and heads of services and are encouraged to talk through issues, rather than emailing. This has resulted in swifter resolution of issues. There has been a significant drop in informal escalations and IROs report that this is due to them not consistently recording the conversations they've had using the case alert on Mosaic. It is likely that therefore the number of informal alerts is actually much higher and we are working on IROs consistently recording their footprint. IROs had to cover significant sickness issues throughout 2023/24 and this has had an impact on both their recording and oversight as caseloads increased for a significant period. IROs will firstly seek to resolve issues informally, and this is evidenced by data which shows that from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 there were 65 case alerts (on Mosaic) by IROs resulting in resolution at an earlier stage necessitating far fewer higher level escalations.

There have been high levels of monitoring of progression of care planning for young people but this hasn't always been recorded or followed through formally as an escalation. IROs need ensure they have a consistent approach to informal and formal escalations and this is something we are working on as a service.

The IRO Service has mechanisms in place to scrutinise the practice of IROs and make sure that the focus remains entirely on the needs of the child. Managerial oversight of midway reviews and escalations are the checks and balances in place to monitor IROs' effectiveness in responding to concerns and achieving improved outcomes for children.

The table below (Table 8) shows escalations made to year end 2023/24 by type of issue raised by the IRO Service. As can be seen, the predominant issues centre on the quality of care planning and care plan delays as well as safeguarding concerns. **Please note that numbers will not tally as IROs will select multiple choices from Mosaic when recording alerts and escalations.**

Issue raised	Issues number
LAC Drift in implementing plan	2
LAC Inadequate care plan	3
LAC Social work provision concerns	1
LAC Placement concerns	2
LAC Education concerns	1
LAC Other	1
LAC Incomplete review decisions	1
LAC Safeguarding concerns	3

Table 8 - Source: Mosaic

From April 1<sup>st</sup> 2023 to March 31<sup>st</sup> 2024 IROs have made 12 formal escalations to managers. One escalation (8%) was escalated to stage 2 to Assistant Director to be resolved. The escalation form is in the process of being redeveloped as the current form is not as widely used as it should be. There have been delays with implementing the change to the form due to resourcing issues. No issues were referred to CAFCASS, although as stated, IROs work in close liaison with Guardians for independent oversight of care planning.

Monitoring, alerts and escalation is an area which requires ongoing review to ensure the IRO Service is as effective as possible in the interests of children. We have undertaken lunch time learning sessions throughout the year and one outcome is the change the escalation and midway review forms to make them more use friendly, streamlined and focused on the impact on the child.

## Update on 2022/23 priorities

Fortnightly focus on practice sessions between September and December 2023 will focus on all aspects of the IRO role and how the service can continue to be more effective and child centred. Comprehensive practice guidance will be produced at the end of the sessions to ensure consistency in practice amongst IROs. This will also be helpful for the social work teams so they better understand the role and responsibilities of the IRO – *the sessions took place and were extended, practice guidance to be finalised. Further sessions are planned*

Closer working relationships with the social work teams are required in order to ensure there is a culture where Care and Pathway Plans are completed in good time, social workers prioritise attendance at reviews and ensure they complete the actions between reviews which are recorded in care and pathway plans and the IRO recommendations. Regular coffee mornings will take place in the social work offices as well as attendance by the Service Manager at the social work service meetings to boost visibility of IROs and understanding of the role – *the Service Manager and IROs have met with various social work services and ongoing meetings are planned. The Service Manager has also attended performance meetings with various services.*

The Service Manager will continue to work with the performance team to expand the Powerbi monitoring dashboard so we can have a wider picture (in real time) of areas of strength and development for the IRO service. Additions will include reporting on children's participation codes, reporting on parental participation, which we do not currently measure, reporting on the themes from escalations, reporting on children being seen in person as part of their review and finally reporting on midway reviews. This will enable us to ensure we are monitoring these areas and able to understand and respond to the holistic performance of the service in real time, rather than when the end of year statistics are collated – *this has been partially achieved, there have been delays due to capacity to develop and modify Mosaic forms and further work is required and should be completed by the end of the year.*

The service will continue to focus on maintaining the timeliness of children's looked after reviews – *achieved and ongoing.*

There will be closer oversight and monitoring of stability and permanence for children and young people – *this is an ongoing piece of work and further sessions are planned with the new permanence leads in October 2024.*

Escalation processes will be improved. The escalation form and process is changing and will be relaunched by the end of 2023. IROs and all social work teams have been consulted about the changes and a new form has been drafted. Clear guidance about the changes and process will be provided for IROs and social work teams – *this has been partially achieved, there have been delays due to capacity to develop and modify Mosaic forms and further work is required and should be completed by the end of the year .*

The Quality Assurance Unit, alongside young people and care leavers will continue to provide training to the social work teams to ensure Care Plans are co-produced with children and young people and written in the first person – *achieved and ongoing.*

Speakerbox now has two Children's Rights and Participation Officers. With this increased capacity they have started to expand their reach. Their focus is on engaging a wider group of children and young people, particularly under 13s and those with additional needs or a disability, living out of borough, in custodial settings and unaccompanied asylum seeking children – *achieved and ongoing.*



## Developmental Work for 2024/25

Work is ongoing continually to improve the effectiveness and quality of the work done by IROs and the wider Service. The following priorities have been identified for 2024/25;

- Obtaining 360 feedback from young people, families and professionals about their experience of the review to enable the service to build on it's strengths and respond to young people and families voices and feedback. Feedback forms to be distributed following the review and the Service Manager to observe at least one review per year for each IRO and to contact a selection of children and families following reviews
- To work with the social work services to change the culture of care plans and pathways plans often being provided late for reviews and dates being changed at the last minute due to social worker availability. To also improve the timeliness of IROs recording the reviews within statutory timescales
- Midway Review form to be redeveloped to ensure there is a consistent approach and the recording of ongoing monitoring and oversight
- To complete the redevelopment of the escalation forms so there is a consistent, timely and child focused approach to resolving issues for children and young people
- To ensure young people and families consistently receive the care plans and records of the review by considering whether there could be funding for a convener in the IRO service. This would also reduce social worker and IRO administrative burdens and enable them to spend more time with children and young people
- There will be closer oversight and monitoring of stability and permanence for children and young people and a consistent approach to escalating if there is drift and delay. There is now a Permanency Lead linked to the IRO service who we will work closely with
- Speakerbox now has two Children's Rights and Participation Officers. With this increased capacity they have expanded their reach and are focusing on a more strategic approach and joint working with other services and areas across the Council to increase opportunities for children and young people and ensure their voices are heard and amplified and contribute to service design and development



<b>Meeting Name:</b>	Corporate Parenting Committee
<b>Date:</b>	11 November 2024
<b>Report title:</b>	Corporate Parenting Committee – Work Plan 2024-25
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>	All
<b>Classification:</b>	Open
<b>Reason for lateness (if applicable):</b>	N/a

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That the corporate parenting committee agree the approach and work plan as set out in the report.
2. That the committee review and identify any further items for consideration in the work plan.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

#### **Role and function of the corporate parenting committee**

3. The constitution for the municipal year 2024-2025 records the corporate parenting committee's role and functions as follows:
  - a. To secure real and sustained improvements in the life chances of looked after children, and to work within an annual programme to that end.
  - b. To develop, monitor and review a corporate parenting strategy and work plan.
  - c. To seek to ensure that the life chances of looked after children are maximised in terms of health, educational attainment, and access to training and employment, to aid the transition to a secure and productive adulthood.
  - d. To develop and co-ordinate a life chances strategy and work plan to improve the life chances of Southwark looked after children.
  - e. To recommend ways in which more integrated services can be developed across all council departments, schools and the voluntary sector to lead towards better outcomes for looked after children.
  - f. To ensure that mechanisms are in place to enable looked after children and young people to play an integral role in service

planning and design, and that their views are regularly sought and acted upon.

- g. To ensure performance monitoring systems are in place, and regularly review performance data to ensure sustained performance improvements in outcomes for looked after children.
- h. To receive an annual report on the adoption and fostering services to monitor their effectiveness in providing safe and secure care for looked after children.
- i. To report to the council's cabinet on an annual basis.
- j. To make recommendations to the relevant cabinet decision maker where responsibility for that particular function rests with the cabinet.
- k. To report to the scrutiny sub-committee with responsibility for children's services after each meeting.
- l. To appoint non-voting co-opted members.

#### **National and local context for care leavers**

- 4. There is national momentum towards improving outcomes for care leavers. The government introduced 'Keep on Caring' strategy in 2016, increased council statutory duties to care leavers in the Children and Social Work Act in 2017, appointed a national Adviser for Care Leavers who produced a report in 2018, alongside the national launch of the Care Covenant. The council has responded to the various recommendations, for example by prioritising education, employment and training outcomes for care leavers in the Council Plan and developing the care leaver local offer as well as increasing service capacity for the extended personal adviser duties to 25.
- 5. Although much has been done to improve services and outcomes for care leavers, the council has an ambition to go above and beyond, by creating the best Leaving Care Service possible, by co-designing this with young people, learning from other organisations and trialling new ideas to test what works best.
- 6. In 2017 the council and Catch22 received funding from the DfE Social Care Innovation Programme to work in partnership to design and test new ways of working to support care leavers. The Care Leavers Partnership (CLP) works to improve outcomes for young people in Southwark by working across boundaries, reshaping the service delivery model, unlocking capacity in the community, and co-designing solutions. There are a number of strands that the CLP is working on to achieve our goals.

#### **KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

- 7. The corporate parenting committee review and update the work plan each

meeting. Following the beginning of the municipal year 2019-20, and reflecting on the momentum towards improving outcomes for care leavers, the opportunity has been taken to review how the committee works and present proposals to refresh this in relation to: non-voting co-opted members; committee approach; and work plan and suggested agenda items.

## **Corporate Parenting Committee work plan 2024-25 – draft**

### **26 February 2025**

- Speakerbox verbal update
- Care leaver and housing protocol
- Adoption annual report.

### **1 April 2025**

- Speakerbox verbal update
- Employment charter (requested July 2024 committee).

## **SpeakerBox**

8. SpeakerBox, established in 2005, ensures that the views of looked after children and care leavers are used to influence decision making that affects their care and support particularly service planning and design. Representing children and young people between 8 and 24 years the group also provides a peer to peer networking support system for looked after children. The programme is operated independently and run by the young people themselves, although it is supported by the council's children services and councillors.

## **Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts**

### **Community impact statement**

5. The work of the corporate parenting committee contributes to community cohesion and stability.

### **Equalities (including socio-economic) impact and health impact statement**

6. Relevant issues will be addressed in the reports submitted to the corporate parenting committee.

### **Climate change implications**

7. The work plan process for the committee has no direct implications.

## Resource implications

8. There are no specific implications arising from this report.

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Minutes of meetings of Corporate Parenting Committee	Constitutional Team 160 Tooley Street London SE1 2QH	<a href="mailto:Paula.thornton@southwark.gov.uk">Paula.thornton@southwark.gov.uk</a>
<b>Web link:</b> <a href="http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=129&amp;Year=0">http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=129&amp;Year=0</a>		

## APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

## AUDIT TRAIL

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<b>Report Author</b>	Beverley Olamijulo/ Paula Thornton, Constitutional Team	
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<b>Dated</b>	31 October 2024	
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<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments included</b>
Assistant Chief Executive – Governance and Assurance	No	No
Strategic Director of Resources	No	No
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	No	No
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>	31 October 2024	

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**CORPORATE PARENTING DISTRIBUTION LIST (OPEN)****MUNICIPAL YEAR 2024-25**

**NOTE:** Original held by Constitutional Team; all amendments/queries to  
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