

Corporate Parenting Annual Summary

Corporate Parenting Committee

Children and Families Division
Children and Adults Department

April 2022



Introduction and purpose

The Council's vision for the people of Southwark states

Everything that we do as a council is to work towards a fairer, more equality and just Southwark.

Supporting families to care for their children well is at the centre of the Council's vision of a fairer future for all. As a corporate parent to our children in care and care leavers this means we expect our services to be that excellent parents to all our children, with a relentless focus on challenging ourselves to answer the question; **“would this be good enough for my child?”**

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

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the delivery of services for our children to the Corporate Parenting Committee, including:

- Understanding the profile of our children in care
- Key performance indicators for service delivery and our impact on outcomes for our children in care
- A review of the work of the Committee over 2021-22

Governance

Legal Context

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 defines seven **corporate parenting principles** that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their duties to care for looked-after children and care leavers. The challenge put to local authorities is to answer the critical question ‘**would this be good enough for my child?**’.

The Principles

In order to thrive, children and young people have certain key needs that good parents generally meet:

1. to act in the best interests, and promote the **physical and mental health and wellbeing**, of those children and young people
2. to encourage those children and young people to **express their views, wishes and feelings**
3. to take into account the **views, wishes and feelings** of those children and young people
4. 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**

5. to promote **high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes**, for those children and young people
6. for those children and young people to be **safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work**; and
7. to prepare those children and young people for **adulthood and independent living**.

Corporate Parenting Committee

Southwark’s Corporate Parenting Committee has oversight of the delivery of the corporate parenting principles and ensures accountability of services to implement the principles and improve the life chances of children in care and care leavers.

The Committee has continued to show its commitment to our children and young people throughout the last 12 months and the whole pandemic period. Continuing to meet quarterly as scheduled, both virtually and in person.

The work of the corporate parenting committee 2021-2022

The Corporate Parenting Committee effectively governs the progress of children in care and care leavers and the delivery of services to them. This is achieved through a **strong and diverse membership**:

Membership

- Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education (Chair)
- Elected Members
- Foster Carer
- Community Representative
- Expert Advisor
- Children's Social Care Leaders
- Health Representative
- Children & Young People

Critical to the work of the committee is the integrated **voice of children and young people**, and those that parent and care for them.

Despite the pressures of the pandemic the committee has continued to meet routinely to provide assurance on the delivery of improving outcomes for children in our care and has maintained its programme of sessions with members, officers and young people.

Areas of Focus – 2021-22

Over the past 12 months the committee has rightly had a strong focus on the impact of the pandemic on children and young people but has continued to scrutinise core delivery and outcomes for our children in care and care leavers, including:

- Mental health services for children in care
- Wider health outcomes
- Education outcomes
- The sufficiency of placement provision
- Renewal of the Corporate Parenting Strategy
- Self-evaluation of service delivery for children in care and care leavers
- Effective support for unaccompanied asylum seeking children
- The delivery of fostering and adoption services

The work of the corporate parenting committee 2021-22

A New Strategy for Children in Care & Care Leavers

In July 2021 the Committee approved the refreshed Corporate Parenting Strategy to govern and deliver improved outcomes for or children in care and care leavers for the next 3 years, setting a renewed vision that “We want all children and young people in Southwark to grow up in a safe, healthy and happy environment where they have the opportunity to reach their potential.” The strategy set out 6 strategic priorities for the years ahead:

Strategic Priorities

- **Supporting More Families to Safely Stay Together** - 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.
- **Growing Up Safe and Independent in Society** - 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.
- **Health, Wellbeing, Education & Opportunity** - 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.

- **Happy, Safe and Stable** - Making sure that everyone 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.
- **Identity & Belonging** - 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.
- **A Whole Borough That 'Cares to Care'** - 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.



The work of the corporate parenting committee 2021-22

The voice of children and young people

The Committee is focussed on ensuring that the voice of children and young people is at the heart of everything it does. That those in our care and who have left our care are central to discussions about how we influence, adapt and develop services to meet their needs, and that their experiences influence all conversations and decisions that will impact them now and in the future.

The Committee has continued to dedicated time for young people from the children in care council; Speakerbox, to present to, facilitate and lead workshops with members and officers throughout 2021-22

Over the course of the pandemic these sessions have sought to understand the impact on our children and young people and hold services to account for their responsiveness to these dynamic needs and demands to ensure that all of our children in care and care leavers are provided the best possible support.

Focussed sessions with our children and young people

April 2021 – Experiences of lock down and Covid-19 for Children and Young People

Young people attended the panel to describe their experience during lockdown, talking positively about the wellbeing offer that services had developed, but described the challenges of moving to virtual engagement events, broadening the accessibility of sessions and the impact this had on concerns about isolation.

July 2021 - Emotional Health and Wellbeing - Care leavers

The local offer for care leavers was received, and health colleagues described the profile of emotional wellbeing concerns for our care leavers and the availability of services to support care leavers. Young people attended to share their experience of support provided to them to inform improving the offer.

November 2021 – Education and employment workshop

Young people attended the panel to describe how they have been supported to access education and employment opportunities. Young people talked about the need to be supported to build their confidence in going forward for opportunities, and in particular how more support can be provided for young people with additional needs and mental health concerns, to be prepared for employment.

March 2021 – Supporting Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

Following visits by the Chair of the committee to UASC children in their care placements, a session was held with a group of UASC young people to inform understanding of their experience of services and support to them, including access to services such as housing and navigation of the asylum and immigration system.

The work of the corporate parenting committee 2021-22 – Responding to Covid-19

Throughout 2021-22 the Committee has continued to hold services accountable for ensuring that children and young people have been effectively supported to manage and cope with the issues and demands that the unprecedented period has placed on them:

Emotional and Mental Wellbeing

The committee received routinely sought and received assurance from services on the **enhanced packages of support** to children in care and care leavers to address the continuing impact of the pandemic. Both targeted at maintaining emotional wellbeing through increased **engagement opportunities and access to peer and network support**, but also through the delivery of the embedded clinical service and partnership health offer to ensure that children's mental health services were prioritised for those in our care throughout the year.

Digital Poverty

The Committee held services accountable for ensuring that the **roll-out of laptops**, through the Department for Education offer, Virtual School and Social Care services meant that children in care and care leavers were prioritised to support them to engage with services, their education and maintain contact with their networks and support workers.

Access to education, employment and training

Regular reporting from Social Care leaders and the Virtual School has provided the committee with the opportunity to scrutinise and challenge services to ensure that children in care and care leavers continued to receive **effective services to maintain their educational progress and attendance** throughout the pandemic, and that the leaving care offer across the council prioritised the needs of our children, through the development of new apprenticeships and opportunities for employment

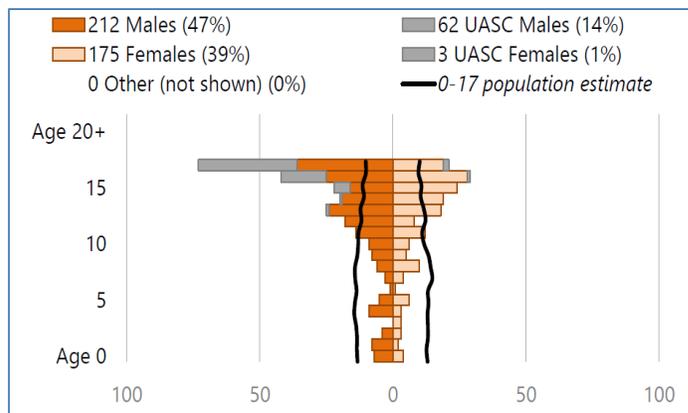
Access to housing

Supporting young people to transition into independent living arrangements presented one of the most significant and ongoing challenges from the pandemic and the previous 12 months, with access to **housing severely impacted by the availability of appropriate accommodation**. The committee has routinely scrutinised the delivery of the wider issue of sufficiency for children in care including the availability of semi-independent and independent housing for our children and young people, and continues to challenge services and the wider authority to prioritise the needs of our children and young people.

Our Children in care

463 children are in care

At the end of March 2022 there were 463 children in our care, including 71 (15%) unaccompanied asylum seeking children, This number has more than doubled in the last 9 months. This is an historically low number, reflecting declining numbers over the last decade from over 600, against the national trend.



235 children came into care

In the 12 months to March 2022, 235 children came into our care. Of those 235 young people aged 16 or over represented 47% (111) of those who came into our care in the year, with 75% of those aged 16+ being young boys.

215 children and young people left our care

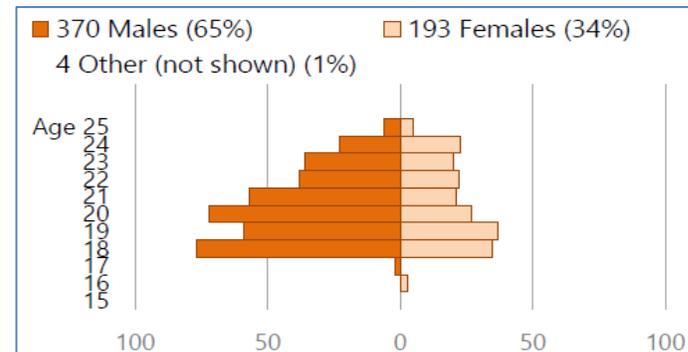
84 of the children who entered care in 2021-22 also left our care within the year. For those 84 children:

- The average length of time in care was 69 days
- 53 (63%) successfully returned home to live with their parents (50), or moved into Special Guardianship arrangements with relatives or family friends (3).

In total 215 children left our care, the majority 100 (46%) left care when they turned 18, and transitioned to being care leavers. A total of 17 SGOs were granted in the year, and 9 children were adopted.

593 care leavers are receiving services

This is an historically high number driven by changes to regulations in 2018 widening statutory duties for those 21 – 25 years. 164 (29%) are former unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC).



Our Children - demography

82% of our children are adolescents

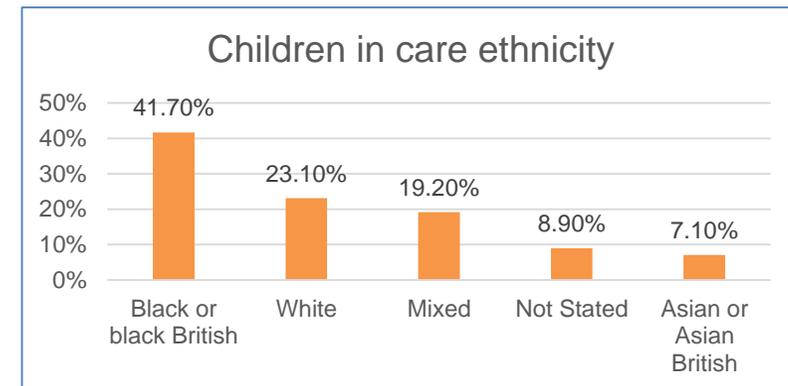
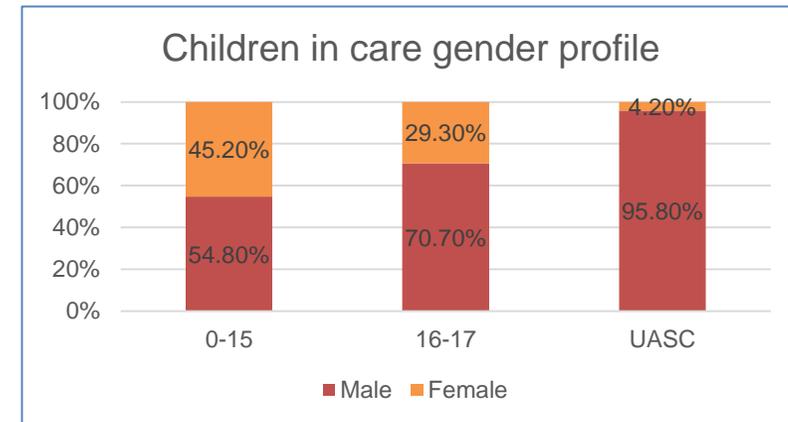
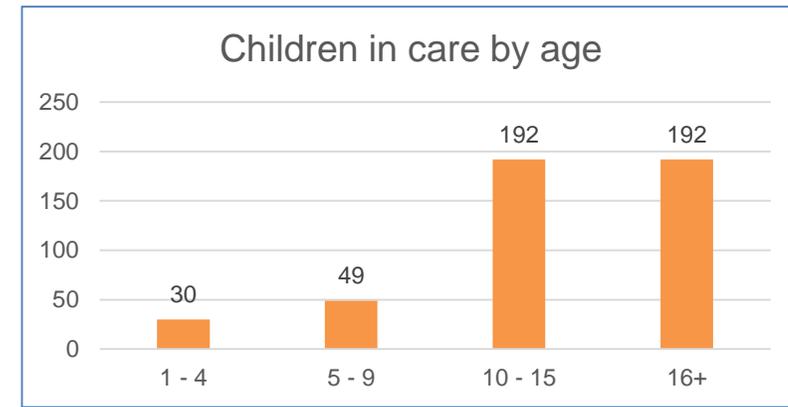
The vast majority of children in our care are adolescents aged 10-15 (41%) and 16-17 (41%).

More older boys are in our care

The gender split of children in our care is relatively even for those children and young people under the age of 15. Significantly more young boys are in care than girls in the 16 and 17 year old age groups. This is largely influenced by the increase in UASC 96% of those young people being boys.

41.7% of children in our care of black or black British

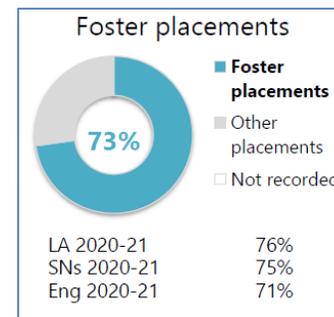
This rises to 43.6% in the adolescent 10-17 year old age group. This compares to a total population figure of 37% in that age group across Southwark as a whole.



Key Performance Indicators – placing our children

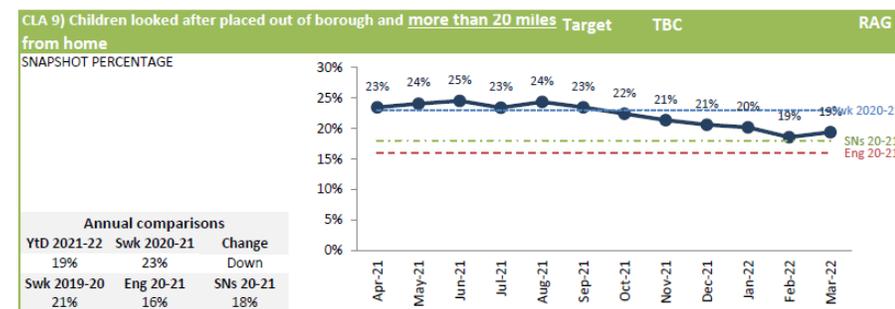
73% of our children are placed with foster families

The majority of our children are placed in family-based settings with foster carers, more than their peers nationally, but slightly less than were in foster placements in March 2021, this percentage fall is impacted by the increased proportion of older UASC young people, who are more likely to be in accommodation other than foster care. The proportion of children living with family and friends has doubled over last 3 years from 7% to 14%.



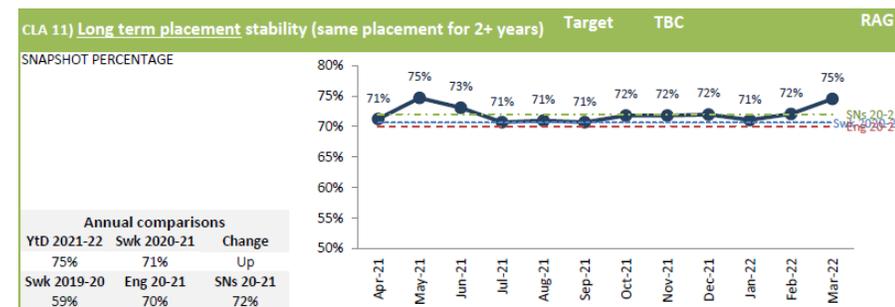
81% of children are placed within 20 miles of home

More children are being placed closer to the borough than in previous years, with just 19% of children placed further than 20 miles from home compared to 23% at the end of March 2021. Some of our children are still placed at a considerable distance from the Borough and this is a significant driver for the ongoing development of locally based residential provision.



More Children in more stable placements

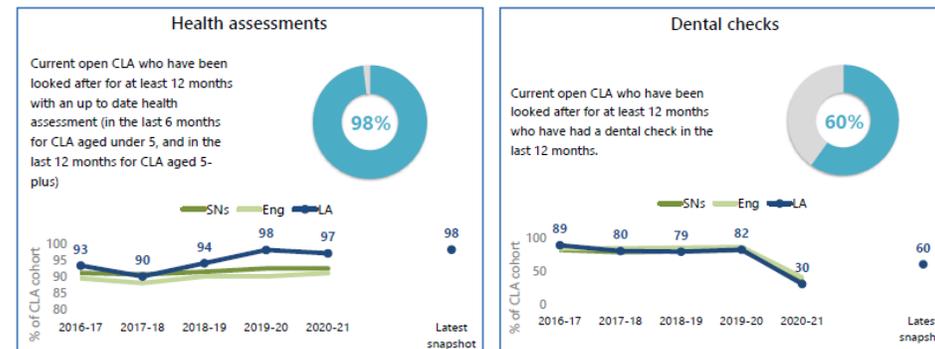
2021-22 has been a period of significant success and improvement in stability for the children in our care. 75% of children in our care have been living in the same placement for more than 2 years, compared to 59% in 2019-20. Only 8.4% of children had more than 3 placements in 2021-22, compared to 11% in 2019-20. Despite the success in achieving better stability for many children, the service is committed and ambitious in driving further improvement in stability for all children.



Key Performance Indicators – health and wellbeing

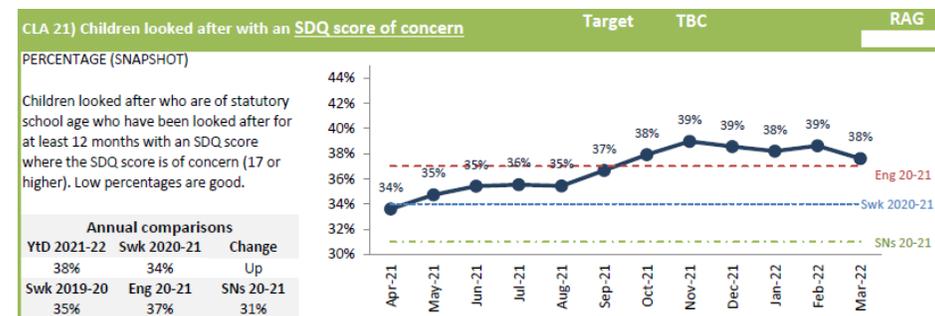
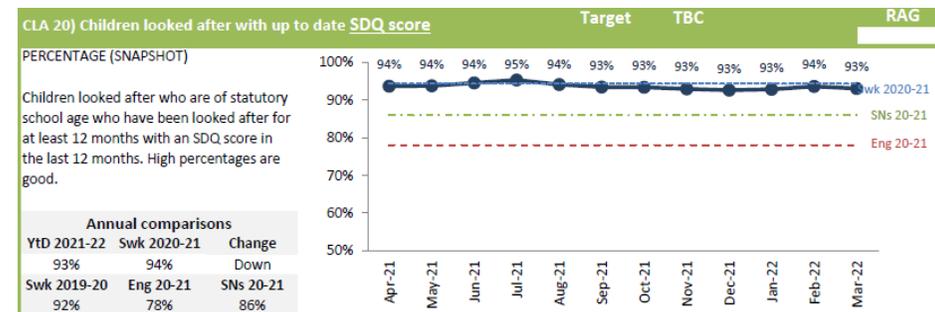
98% of children with up to date health assessments

Almost all of our children regularly receive their health assessments to ensure any needs are identified. Nationally, the delivery of dental health checks for children in care has been significantly impacted and this is true of children in Southwark, however, as pandemic restrictions have eased this has begun to normalise with double the number of children having up to date dental checks at the end of 2021-22 compared to the previous year.



Emotional wellbeing of children in care

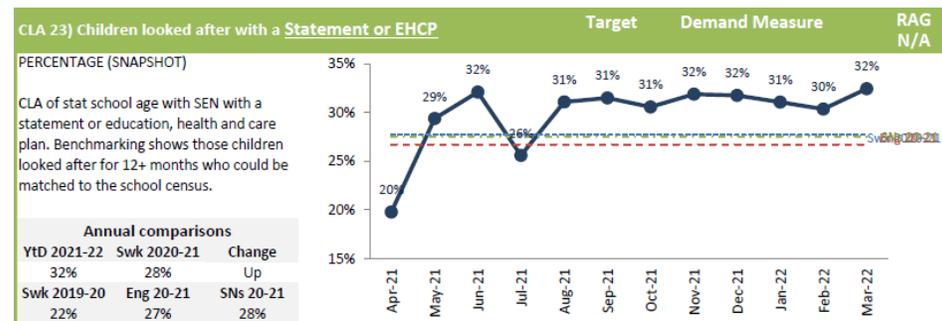
Throughout the past 12 months the care services have continued to effectively track the emotional wellbeing of our children and young people through the use of the Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (93%). As more children have been engaged throughout the year we have seen an increasing impact on their emotional wellbeing from the pandemic, with the percentage of children identified with an SDQ score of concern up to 38% from 34% in the previous year.



Key Performance Indicators – education

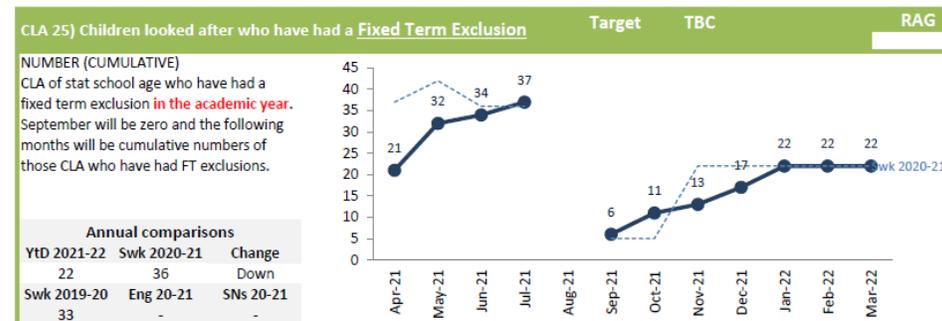
Understanding educational needs of our children

At the end of March 2022, 83% of children in our care had their Personal Education Plans up to date, supporting the detailed understanding and delivery of their educational needs in partnership with schools. The Virtual School works effectively with schools and our care services to ensure children’s educational needs are identified and met. We know that Southwark has a higher level of children with additional needs than their peer population nationally.



Exclusions and attendance

We have seen a significant reduction in the number of children who have been subject to a fixed term exclusion from school in the past 12 months, with just 22 of our children being excluded for a period of time compared to 37 as at the end of 2020-21. Over the year we saw some increases in the number of children whose school attendance levels were of concern. The Virtual School and Care Service Attendance Panel responds quickly to any child with less than 90% attendance to ensure support needed to improve their attendance is in place promptly.



Academic Progress

More children are being effectively supported to make progress in their education across the last 12 months we have seen a decrease to 17% of children identified as not making expected progress in school compared to 28% in 2020-21



Key Performance Indicators – Care leavers

Significant increases in the number of care leavers

Following the new duty to support care leavers up to the age of 25 we have seen a year on year increase in number of **care leavers** for whom we have duties, a 21% rise since April 2019. There are now 593 young people in receipt of support.

Keeping close to our care leavers

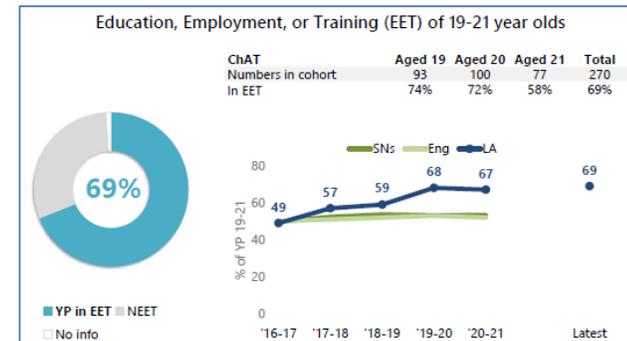
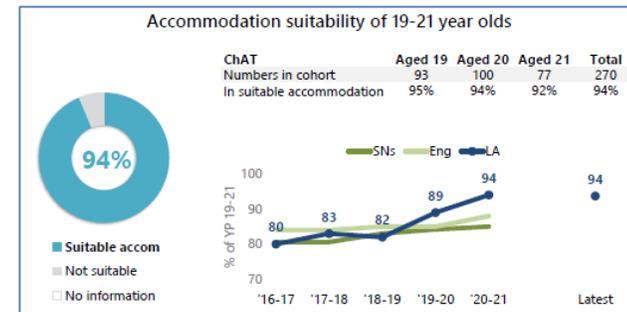
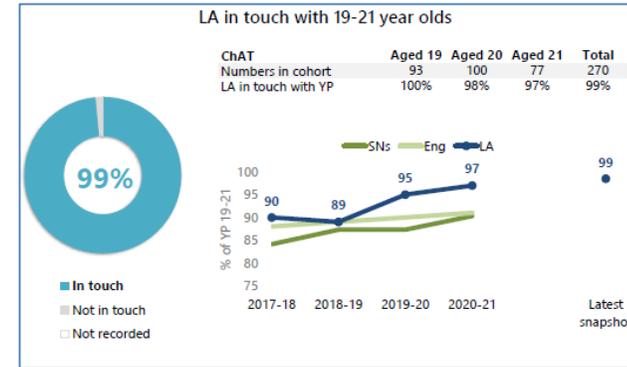
Almost every one of our care leavers is **in touch** with our Care Leaver Service, at 99% compared to 88% nationally

Supporting into suitable accommodation

Almost all of our care leavers are in **suitable accommodation**, at 94% compared to 85% nationally.

Supporting transitions into adulthood

Significantly more care leavers are in **education, employment or training** than their peers nationally, at 69% compared to 53%



Key Performance Indicators – quality of practice delivery

183 detailed audits of our practice - specifically chosen to identify areas of risk

The service routinely undertakes in depth audits of our practice to support our children. The approach to our quality assurance and audit involves both cross system reviews of practice and targeted scrutiny of areas that have been identified as opportunities for improvement through more detailed learning and understanding of the issues affecting performance or quality. In 2021-22 this included 183 audits of casework for children in care and care leavers. Our auditing identified:

Strengths

- Understanding the risks affecting our children and young people
- Good quality plans that understand the lives of children well
- Active participation of children and young people in service improvement and delivery
- Respect and understanding of their ethnicity and diversity needs
- Improving outcomes overall

Areas for development

- The quality of formal re-assessment of needs
- Whilst formal management oversight and supervision takes place regularly the overall consistency of good management oversight can be improved

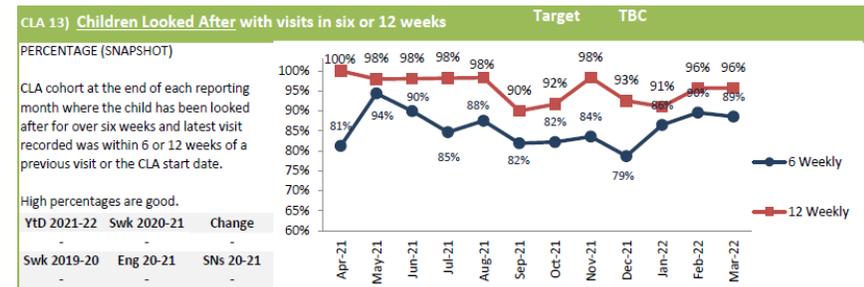
Looked After children reviews

Our plans for children in care are routinely and independently reviewed through the Children in Care Review process attended by family, carers, and other multi-agency professionals working with our children. For our children the significant majority of reviews take place within appropriate timescales (89%)



Visits to children in care

Almost all of the children in our care are visited regularly by their allocated social worker, in line with the expectations set out in their care plans. Often it is older children in care who are less keen to meet regularly with their social workers, but workers maintain regular virtual contact with young people and engage with family and carers routinely.



Participation and engagement of children and young people

The work of the children in care and care leavers council - Speakerbox

Speakerbox is Southwark's Children in Care and Care Leavers Council, comprised of children and young people in care and care leavers up to the age of 25. There is a Primary Age Group (ages 6-11), a secondary age group (12 to 16/18) and a care leaver group (16/18 to 21/25). SpeakerBox is a young people led forum where children and young people in care and care leavers can meet peers, talk about their experience of being in care and inform Council practice.

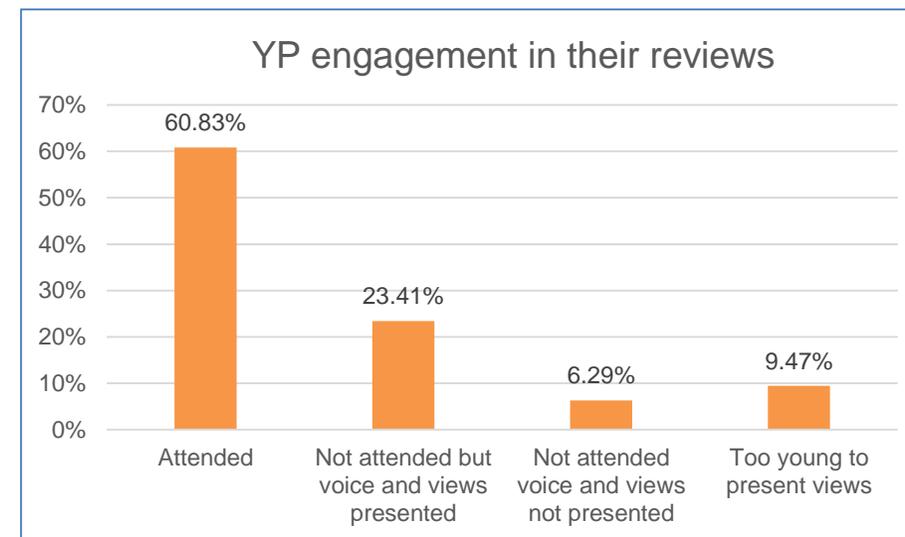
The group has been increasingly placed at the heart of council decision making and service improvement over the last 12 months, in addition to the continued representation at the Corporate Parenting Committee, representatives from Speakerbox and the wider care and care leaver population have:

- Formed a key part of **the decision making process for senior and middle tier management recruitment** across the Children & Families Services
- Continued to work on the iterative development of the [Local Offer for care leavers](#)
- Supported our consultation activity and been central to the **development and design of new services**, such as the Adolescent Sure Start pilot programme
- Worked directly with our practice and systems change activity to improve key areas of delivery such as how we prepare reports and conduct our meetings in a child friendly way, **the language we use and our organisational culture**, and how we can improve the way in which we capture the voice, wishes and feelings of all our children.

Attendance and representation at reviews

Ensuring that **all children and young people** are supported to represent themselves and have their voice, wishes and feelings heard and at the centre of the development of their Care and Pathway Plans is critical.

We do this for all children by providing them with access to advocates, support workers and ensuring they are able to **attend the reviews and care planning meetings** that are held for them. In over 60% of instances children attend their own reviews and contribute either directly or through their advocate to the development of the plans for them. In a further 23% of reviews, children did not attend but had their voice, wishes and feelings represented at those meetings.



Key issues affecting our children in care and areas for development 2022-23

Key issues

The **sufficiency of placements** for children in care is a major sector issue. We do as well as any London borough recruiting foster carers but they are a scarce resource.

The cost of **regulated provision** for **residential care** is highly expensive, controlled by profit making companies. A borough approach is being developed but needs to sit in the context of better regional provision.

The **unregulated provision** of placements that focuses on support not care, called **semi independent accommodation**, is subject to intense scrutiny and may be subject to regulatory change in the future. It is a key part of our 16+ Accommodation and Support Strategy that is currently being reviewed and renewed.

We have seen a doubling in the number of **unaccompanied asylum seeking children** (UASC) since the opening of Home Office Initial Accommodation Centres in the borough in June 2021



Areas for development

Care plans to be increasingly high quality and more consistently co-produced with children and young people

The timeliness of children in care statutory **reviews** to reach continue to improve and care leavers pathway plan reviews

Fully embedding the **voice, wishes and feelings** of the wider group of our children and young adults in our development activity and across the council

Better understand and help those children in care for whom their **school attendance** is below 90%

Develop **more local placements** in or near the borough including the development of increased residential care

Learning from good levels of **placement stability** achieved during the pandemic to sustain these as business as usual

Implementation of the new the **Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Tool** to have greater understanding and tracking of the emotional well-being of children in care.