

<b>Item No.</b> 8.	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 17 January 2023	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Cabinet
<b>Report title:</b>		Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2022-23	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>		Councillor Jasmine Ali - Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education	

## **FOREWORD – COUNCILLOR JASMINE ALI, DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION**

I am delighted to introduce the Corporate Parenting Annual Report to Cabinet. I am equally delighted to share this foreword with the fantastic chair of Speaker Box, Rukiya Davenport.

We know that care experience 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. Yet here in Southwark many things are going well. We have a dedicated social work team, highly experienced and loving foster carers and an effective corporate parenting committee that is committed to improving outcomes for children and young people in our care.

In 2018 when I became chair, I worked closely with the now Director of Children’s Services, councillor colleagues and Speaker Box, our fantastic group of young people who give voice to the issues important for children in care, to make sure that all of our meetings are representative of our young people. We hold thematic meetings covering the issues that young people see as their personal priorities such as housing, education, health, immigration and employment. Young people tell us that housing is a key priority. Therefore the Housing cabinet member and two of his leading officers regularly update the committee on progress on accommodation. Our young people ensured that we lobby the Home Office on the many issues confronting our unaccompanied asylum seeking young people in care.

We introduced a series of co-opted committee members including a foster carer, employment specialist and policy expert – all with care experience. Outcomes for children in our care are the best that we have seen to date. We are working hard so that we can have great outcomes for all of the 420 children in our care and all of the 708 young people who are care leavers. The report highlights includes 94% of care leavers supported in suitable accommodation, with many benefiting from more housing closer to Southwark. The report also highlights success of bespoke education plans and many the young people getting their first choice university. This year that included a care leaver overcoming major challenges to get a place at Oxford University. Thanks to Speaker Box we have a number of events run by our young people in care for our young people in care – including the fortnightly sessions by Speaker Box called Creative Collective bringing young people leaving our care together.

After five years we had our 'Big Ofsted' that rated our children's services good across the piece, including this time unlike last time our Care Leavers service. Then as 2023 drew to a close and Christmas approached we had an Ofsted Care Leavers 'Focussed Visit'. We have not received a formal letter yet but the verbal feedback was excellent.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone at Southwark council for their part in the success of this report. Not least the children and young people themselves and of course the Corporate Parenting Committee: Cllrs Charlie Smith, Naima Ali, Natasha Ennin, Esme Dobson, Darren Merrill, and Rachel Bentley. Officers: Alasdair Smith, Helen Woolgar, Andrew Fowler, Clare Ryan, Dechaun Malcolm, Elaine Reid, Usha Singh and Paula Thornton.

Going forward we know well that there is more to do. We know well that the challenges that confront us all remain like the post Covid-19 landscape, the persistent cost of living crisis and the impact of thirteen years of cuts to local government services. However we must remain optimistic and ambitious for our children. As this report shows our approach can work, as long as we remember that nothing is too good for the children in our care.

## **FOREWORD – RUKIYA DAVENPORT CHAIR OF SPEAKERBOX, SOUTHWARK CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL**

I am Rukiya, I am a creative. I love performing and creating art. I am also the chair of the Children in Care Council and advocacy service, Speakerbox. We do social outings, trips and provide support. We empower children and young people who have experience of being in care to have a voice while providing a safe space for them to feel at home and meet other people. We want them to find a home with us.

As someone who is care experienced I use this to drive my creativity and get involved in Speakerbox. I get involved from the inside to develop and change services using my experiences to drive change. I want to encourage all children and young people to have their voices heard, drive change and advocate for themselves.

This report is to let you know what the Corporate Parenting Committee has been doing over the last year and for the coming year. Many young people supported by Speakerbox have been very involved in meeting with the committee making sure what is important to us is spoken about and our voices listened to.

Speakerbox is for children and young people who have experience of being in care. We want to continue to encourage more to come forward so we can hear what is important to them, to influence what the council should be doing and prioritising to support them now and in the future.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That cabinet:

1. Note the report including progress of Corporate Parenting Strategy, areas of focus for 2024-25 and work of the Corporate Parenting Committee.
2. Note a child friendly easy read version of the report that will be shared widely with children in care and care leavers and made publicly available and easily accessible on the council's website

## PURPOSE OF REPORT

3. The purpose of this report is to provide cabinet 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<sup>1</sup>.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

4. This report provides an overview of the council delivery of its corporate parenting duties during 2022-23. It sets out our achievements in delivering our Corporate Parenting Strategy as well as what more we need to do. It describes the work of the Corporate Parenting Committee in delivering its role to *secure real and sustained improvements in the life chances of looked after children.*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Southwark Corporate Parenting Committee – Purpose of the Committee](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Southwark Corporate Parenting Committee – Purpose of the Committee](#)

## What is a corporate parent?

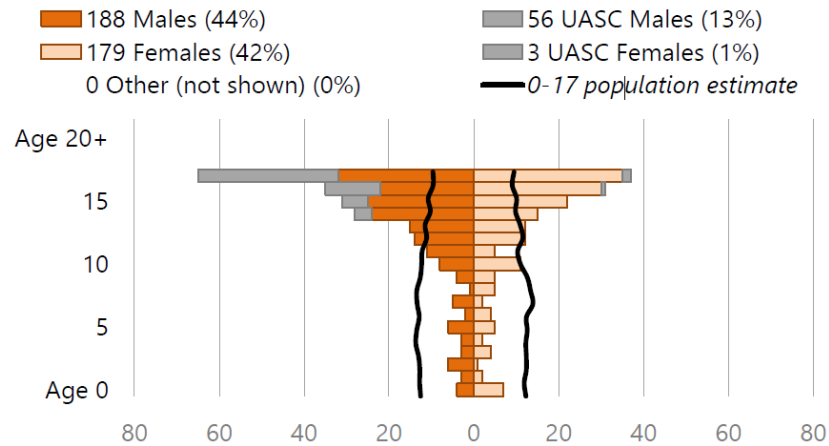
5. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 says that when a child comes into the care of the local authority, or is under 25 and was in the care of the local authority for at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday, the authority becomes their corporate parent. This means that they should follow the core principles enshrined in the 2017 legislation to:
  - act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people
  - encourage them to express their views, wishes and feelings, and take them into account
  - make sure they have access to services
  - make sure children and young people are safe, with stable home lives, relationships and education or work
  - promote high aspirations and try to secure the best outcomes for them
  - prepare them for adulthood and independent living.
6. As corporate parents, it's every councillor's responsibility to make sure that the council is meeting these duties towards children in care and care leavers.
7. 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.
8. 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.
9. 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>3</sup>;

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<sup>3</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](#)

## Who are the children in our care?

10. At the end of March 2023 there were 420 children in care, 8% less than April 2022. Southwark has a lower rate of children in care (64 per 10,000) than nationally (70 per 10,000), but more than the rate across London (52 per 10,000). 14% (58) of the children in our care at March 2023 were unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) compared to 7% nationally.



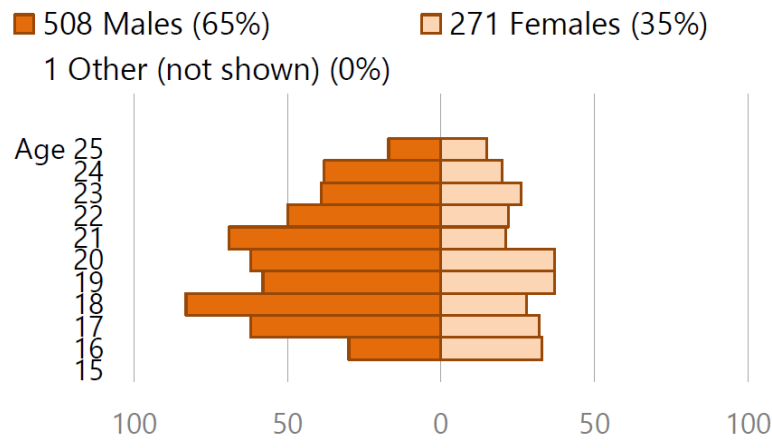
11. This is an historically low number, reflecting declining numbers over the last decade from over 600, against the national trend (3 percent over the last 20 years). Around half of all children in care enter at 16 or 17 years old.

	All CLA	Not UASC	UASC
White	22%	25%	2%
Mixed	22%	25%	2%
Asian or Asian British	5%	2%	25%
Black or black British	43%	46%	22%
Other ethnic group	9%	2%	49%
Not stated	0%	0%	0%
Not recorded	0%	0%	0%

12. 30% (65) of the children who left care in 2022-23 were supported by the service to return home to their parents in a planned way, compared to 18% nationally. A further 30% were supported to move into living independently.
13. 182 children came into our care in 2022-23 the majority (60%) were adolescents. Most children who came into our care also left care in the year (63%) the majority of those children spent less than a month in our care before they were supported to safely return home. 227 children left our care.
14. The rate of children entering care in 2022-23 was 27.6 per 10,000 compared to 40 per 10,000 in 2021-22, and against a national average of 26 per 10,000.
15. 98% of our children in care have an up to date annual health assessment compared to 89% nationally. 76% have an up to date dental check compared to 70% nationally.

## Who are the young people we support as care leavers?

16. At the end of March 2023 our services were actively supporting 708 care leavers aged 16 to 25 years old. Southwark has a rate of care leavers (177 per 10,000) higher than the London average of (137 per 10,000). This is an 20% increase from April 2022. 17% of our care leavers were formerly UASC.



17. 86% of care leavers aged 17-18 were in education, employment or training, compared to 66% nationally, and 74% of care leavers aged 19-21 were in education, employment or training, compared to 55% nationally.

White	19%
Mixed	11%
Asian or Asian British	8%
Black or black British	47%
Other ethnic group	14%
Not stated	0%
Not recorded	0%

18. 94% of our care leavers aged 19-21 were in supported to live in suitable accommodation, compared to 88% nationally.
19. Children in our care and care leavers did themselves, and us as corporate parents, proud by achieving passes at GCSE and A-Levels, including straight A's, B's, ABC's, Distinctions and Merits, with one student achieving AAA\* to meet (and then accept) their offer from St Hugh's College, Oxford University. At least eight students received offers from their first choice universities.

## Corporate Parenting Strategy

20. In July 2021 the Corporate Parenting Committee agreed Caring to Care: Achieving Excellence for Our Children<sup>4</sup> - Southwark's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-2024.
21. The strategy sets out how the council intends to deliver on the Corporate Parenting Principles set within The Children and Social Work Act 2017. The principles are, in relation to children and young people in the council's care to:
  - act in their best interests, and promote their physical and mental health and wellbeing,
  - encourage them to express their views, wishes and feelings
  - take into account their views, wishes and feelings
  - help them gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
  - promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes,
  - be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
  - prepare them for adulthood and independent living.
22. Our Corporate Parenting Strategy delivers on the principles through 6 priorities which are:
  - Supporting More Families to Safely Stay Together
  - Growing Up Safe and Independent in Society
  - Health, Wellbeing, Education & Opportunity
  - Happy, Safe and Stable
  - Identity & Belonging
  - A Whole Borough That 'Cares to Care'

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<sup>4</sup> [Southwark Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-2024 – July 2021](#)

## KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

### Strategy Priority 1: Supporting More Families to Safely Stay Together

#### Our commitment

23. Ensuring all children and 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.
24. What **we said we would do**
  - 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

25. We have year on year increasingly supported more children to remain at home with their parents and families. By the end of 2022-23 the rate of children in care was below the national rate, as well as that of similar boroughs, with just 64 children per 10,000 of our child population in our care, down from 76 per 10,000 children in 2018.
26. We value and invest in families and our services work hard alongside our families to help them realise the support and strength they have together. Since 2017 we have more than trebled (figure 1) the number of children who are in the care of their relatives and wider networks. Maintaining the links between families and supporting children to remain close to those who know and care for them and who they care for.

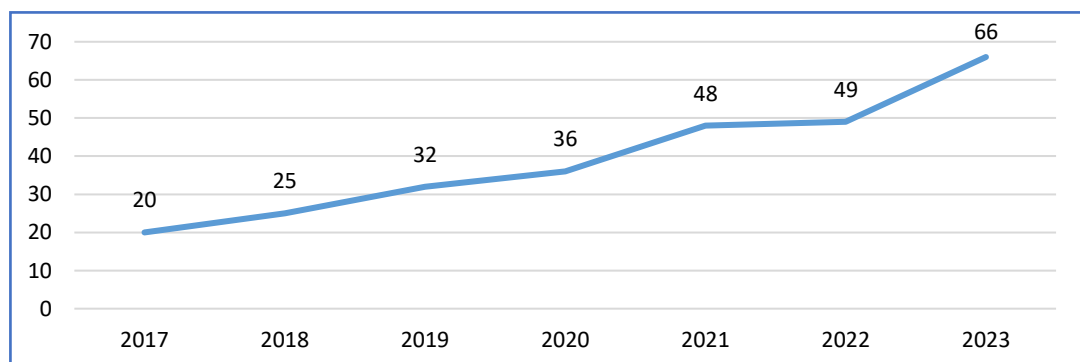


Figure 1: Children in family and friend placements 2017-2023



27. We continue to invest in a specialist Keeping Families Together Team with a focus on supporting children, primarily adolescents, on the edge of care to remain with their families if that is in their best interests. This is particularly important because the rate of older children aged 10 to 16 years entering care has increased from 74% in 2021/22 to 84% in 2022/23.
28. Research has been conducted in this area by the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory and whilst they found that concerns relating to issues outside of the family (extra-familial concerns - such as gang involvement and exposure to criminal or sexual exploitation) were present for a quarter of the children in their study, children were not in care because of either only extra-familial or safeguarding concerns in the family. Children in this age group appear to be impacted by both the extra-familial concerns plus issues of neglect, emotional abuse, and sexual and/or physical abuse. The cumulative trauma experienced by these children and young people has presented challenges to all fostering providers to find and train carers who are able to provide appropriate placements offering the right care for these children and young people. The Nuffield findings are consistent with the experience of our children in Southwark.

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

29. Whilst we have succeeded in safely supporting more and more children to remain at home and with their families. There is more we can do to ensure that families receive help earlier and are less in need of support to remain together to further reduce the rate of children in our care to match our London peers at 52 per 10,000.
30. Nationally around 26% of children who have been supported to return home will return into care at some point later in life. Our children experience approximately the same rate of return into care, and this is overwhelmingly when those children transition into adolescence. We must do more to ensure that those children and their families who have experienced difficulties earlier in their childhood are supported to remain strong and resilient as their children grow into their teenage years.
31. In particular we need to work more closely with our colleagues in the Police to ensure that less teenagers are brought into care in emergency circumstances using powers of police protection (section 46 of the Children Act 1989). With 33% of the children who entered our care in 2022-23 being as a result of the use of powers of police protection, 68% of those being adolescents.
32. We recognise to address this for our adolescents we need to have services that are more responsive with specialist skills in an emergency out of hours in the evenings and weekends. This will build upon the effective work in Keeping Families Together Team but look at how we have this support available out of hours. This wrap around support will be developed in 2023-2024.

## **Strategy Priority 2: Growing Up Safe and Independent in Society**

### **Our commitment**

33. 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.
34. What **we** said **we would** do:
  - 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.
  - Work with Housing to ensure care leavers are given as much help as possible to find not just suitable housing, fit for their futures.
  - Invest in enhanced life skills programmes for all of children in care.
  - Develop deposit support schemes and savings accounts for our children

### **How we have delivered**

35. We successfully supported more 19-21 year old care leavers to remain in the care of their former foster carers. The 'staying put' rate increased from 8% in 2022 to 16% in 2023. The national rate is 9%.
36. We ensured our Children's Social Care and Housing services worked closely to support care leavers, and this has contributed to continued success in ensuring our care leavers are in suitable housing and good quality accommodation with 94% of young people considered to be in suitable accommodation compared to 88% nationally.
37. Our Children's Rights Team provides our children in care and care leavers with a full programme of opportunities to develop the skills they need to live independently, such as our 'Carefree Kitchen' which combines fun, engaging and practical life learning sessions with the opportunity to engage and explore complex issues such as relationships, conflict and safety from exploitation.
38. We re-designed our approach to saving for our children's futures. Previously funding was provided to carers directly to save for the children in their care. We recognise that too often when children move placements or leave care they can face difficulties accessing those savings. We partnered with The Share Foundation to create long-term tax free child savings accounts for all children in care. We also doubled the weekly savings amount from £5 to £10.

## What we still need to achieve

39. The majority of children in care become successfully independent care leavers, in good accommodation, equipped to thrive into adulthood. But we know that the pressure on everyone is increasing, the cost of living is adding significant pressure on already disadvantaged groups and our care leavers remain one of the most exposed groups to these vulnerabilities.
40. We need to create more opportunities and maximise the use of our Care & Care Leaver's facility at Talfourd Place SE15 to deliver more life skills and direct support to our children and young people. We have a vision that in 2023-2024 Talfourd will be developed to be a vibrant Care Experienced Young Person's Hub renamed by young people with an exciting programme of activities co-designed with our children and young people.
41. Our Housing and Children's Service have already recognised that whilst we go above and beyond to support our care leavers into good accommodation, we need to do more to support them to access accommodation that is not just good for today; but good for them to grow and build their future in a stable home and ensuring more of our care leavers who have their own children can be supported to live in appropriate family sized homes.
42. In 2023-2024 we will work with Housing Colleagues and take to the Corporate Parenting Committee for approval a new Protocol for Care Leavers and Housing. This will include the joint Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DHLUC) and Department for Education (DfE) Good Practice Guidance<sup>5</sup> and incorporate the new Pan London Care Leaver Compact<sup>6</sup> pledges on housing which are:
  - Council Tax Exemption for Care Leavers
  - Principles of avoiding 'intentional homelessness' assessments for Care Leavers and extending priority need to the age of 25
  - Rent Deposit Scheme
  - Joint housing protocols for Care Leavers between Housing and Children's Services in line with the Governmental best practice model.

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<sup>5</sup> [Good Practice Guidance](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Pan London Care Leaver Compact](#)

## **Strategy Priority 3: Health, Wellbeing, Education & Opportunity**

### **Our commitment**

43. 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.
44. What **we** said **we would** do:
  - Set high aspirations, listen and develop every possible opportunity for new experiences matching aspirations and harnessing enthusiasm
  - Commit to providing the right digital devices and connections so there is no disadvantage
  - Guarantee access to high quality mental health support
  - Strengthen the sporting, leisure and cultural offer
  - Deliver a comprehensive educational catch-up offer to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

### **How we have delivered**

45. We increased the number of children in our care in good or outstanding schools. In 2022-23 this was 97% of all children, having risen from 95% the previous year. This was helped by continued investment in the council's strong and well equipped Virtual School which is a consistent and powerful advocate for the educational aspirations of all of our children in care.
46. We delivered, through our Virtual School, a Summer Tuition Programme to support Covid Recovery providing over 400 hours of additional tuition to children of all school ages contributing to improved attainment for many. 2023 exam results exceeded pre-pandemic levels. For example in 2023 30% of our children achieved GCSE grades 9-4 in English compared to 24% in 2019, with 21% achieving a strong English result compared to 15% in 2019.
47. We continued to ensure our services focused intensively on support for children through the crucial transition points in their educational journey, to support them to access and remain in the right educational, employment or training arrangement for them. In 2022-23 every one of our children entering Year 12 was allocated a new Education Advisor who supports them throughout the two years of their Key Stage 5 education.
48. In 2022-23 this work resulted in 8 out of 10 of our children receiving offers from their first choice universities, including one pupil who had previously faced significant disruption in their education, including periods of exclusion who was supported jointly by our Virtual School and our Child and Adolescent Mental

Health Service and has now received 3 A's and progressed on to their chosen destination to study law at Oxford University.

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

49. Children in care are much more likely to be identified as having special educational needs and / or disabilities (SEND) than their peers. 41% (112) of our children have an identified special educational need, compared to 13% of the school age population nationally.
50. We know that the two groups in society who experience the most difficulty in achieving positive educational outcomes are those who have been involved with statutory children's social care services, and those with SEND. For children in care who meet both these criteria we know we need to continue to invest in supporting them to achieve and meet their ambitions.
51. We are planning to create more local placement provision for our children and young people. This is centred on ensuring more of our children remain able to access the high level of support of our local services, such as our Virtual School, our clinical mental health support and our schools, 98% of which are rated good or outstanding by Ofsted. We want less disruption in the educational and care journey's for our children and for them to remain in the schools they know, around the professionals they trust, in or near to their own communities.

## Strategy Priority 4: Happy, Safe and Stable

### Our commitment

52. 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.
53. What **we said we** would do:
- 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

54. We have heard from our children and young people, they tell us that our words matter and the way we talk and write about them and their lives shows in the way we relate, behave and deliver support to them. We have integrated new guidance '*Recording for and about children, young people and families in Southwark – writing accessible, with purpose and care*' into our Learning and Development Programme to explicitly focus on changing the way speak, write and think about our children and their experience. The majority of visits to children in care are now recorded as letters to children and Independent Reviewing Officer (IROs) write letters to children at the end of each review.
55. We have secured funding from the Department of Education to build two new children's homes in Southwark run by the council. This funding was matched by capital investment from the council. These children's homes will be the first run by the service in over a decade. They will create new capacity in the heart of the borough to keep our children living closer to home and make sure that they remain connected to their communities. Our first home is due to open in March 2024 and the second in March 2025.
56. We have also, alongside the children's home project, begun a programme of work to re-develop properties to make new high-quality local semi-independent and supported accommodation for our care leavers.
57. We have brought down the rate of children who were living more than 20 miles from home from 21% to 19% over 2023-24. Wherever possible, children and

young people should be supported to live close to their families. We have more to do to support more children to live locally and match our statistical neighbours at 17% of children in care more than 20 miles from home.



**Figure 4: % children in care placed more than 20 miles from home address**

58. The majority of our children in care live in Southwark (25%) or outside of the borough boundary but close by (41%), predominantly in our nearby London boroughs.
59. In March 2023 most of our children are living with foster families (69%) which is a slight reduction on the previous year (72%). This reflects the changing age profile of children in our care with more 16 and 17 year old children living in semi-independent accommodation.

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

60. The stability of care placements is a vital part of delivering good outcomes for our children. In 2023 we saw placement stability fall, with the percentage of children with three or more placements during the year increasing from 9% to 10%, the national average is 10%. Similarly, the percentage of children who have been in the same stable placement for more than 2 years decreased from 76% to 65% and is now lower than the national average of 71%. To help tackle this change in 2023-24 the council will be the first in the United Kingdom to embed an innovative approach, developed by researcher and children's social care professionals in the United States; to understanding and responding to the needs of children in care, called the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessment.
61. In 2023-24 we will be repeating the Bright Spots Survey for children in care and care leavers so the feedback from our children and care leavers directly informs how we develop services and support.

## **Strategy Priority 5: Identity & Belonging**

### **Our commitment**

62. 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.
63. What **we said we** would do:
- 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**

64. In 2022-23 our Children in Care Council 'Speakerbox' have focused on an identity campaign supporting a programme of workshops and sessions on the theme of Identity and Belonging. Over 60 people including many members of the committee attended the launch event at the South London Gallery where our children's photography was displayed, they performed a prepared thematic drama and delivered a spoken word performance. A film they had worked on outlining why identity was so important for care experienced children and young people was premiered.
65. Speakerbox delivered activities and events throughout 2022-23 providing new opportunities and experiences for children in care and care leavers including: a project on identity for different age groups; a film making project; photography project; sports mentoring programme; and trips to escape rooms, bowling, Thorpe Park and Legoland.
66. The service also launched the Caring Life App as part of a plan to ensure all children coming into care better understand why they are looked after and have photographs and important memories recorded and saved for them. The Caring Life App provides a secure space for photographs and previous memories to be uploaded by carers, young people, families and professionals



to ensure children and young people have important memories securely stored. The development of the app, builds on the findings of our existing Re-Connect programme that supports children to re-build relationships that are important to them that were impacted by their entry into care.

67. As a part of our Divisional Southwark Stands Together Against Racism Programme the service undertook a comprehensive review of the assessment, learning and development approach for foster carers about the needs of global majority children and young people in care. This was identified as important through work of the committee during the pandemic. The review identified a number of areas for improvement in how we support carers to support our children from global majority backgrounds. These are now part of the Fostering Service improvement planning for 2023-24.
68. A major driving force for plans to develop local children's home provision was the recognition that children from global majority backgrounds are disproportionately impacted by the lack of local options for them to live. Too often they are required to live in places, areas and communities that do not reflect their background or identity. The work to create local provision will reverse this trend and needs to go further to ensure more of our children do not face this disproportional impact.
69. We have been continuing to deliver throughout 2022-23 a programme of mandatory anti-discriminatory practice training for all social work and social care staff. As a part of the commitment to continually develop and improve both the service and its offer to staff the training programme is being re-commissioned and developed again for 2023-24.

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

70. We want to continue to harness the power of the voice and messages from our children and young people, particularly in how they experience inequality in our system, and how they value the opportunity to understand themselves and their culture. We will be embedding the content produced by our Speakerbox into the training and development offer for staff, to even more put the voice of children at the heart of workforce development.
71. Despite all the positive developments in work to bring more children back to live closer to their communities we know that we are still too often reliant on placements that are away from Southwark. Sometimes this is the right plan for a child but when it is we need to do more to recognise and respond to the disproportional consequences on their identity and access to cultural links that children placed far from the borough can experience.

## **Strategy Priority 6: A Whole Borough That 'Cares to Care'**

### **Our commitment**

72. 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.
73. What **we said we** would do:
- 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**

74. In November Southwark Council Assembly agreed to recommend to the council cabinet a motion to as follows:
- a) To formally support the Show Us You Care Too campaign which calls for care experience to be made a protected characteristic as part of the Independent Review into Children's Social Care;
  - b) For the council to proactively seek out and listen to the voices of care experienced people when developing new policies based on their views;
  - c) To continue to build on the existing ring-fenced apprenticeship opportunities for care experienced people by committing to an agreed number of apprenticeships places each year delivered through the council's levy funding;
  - d) To take an intersectional approach and commit to tackling the systemic discrimination and disproportionality faced by specific groups of care experienced people

75. In January 2023 cabinet agreed this motion. This is a significant step in developing our whole council approach to recognising, supporting and delivering against our corporate parenting duties. We have begun to see this shift in organisational culture translate into practical change within our system through for example the agreement to recognise care experience in our recruitment processes as a criteria for guaranteed interviews.
76. The voice of our children and young people is well heard by our elected members through the attendance of Speakerbox representatives at every Corporate Parenting Committee meeting. Their ideas and feedback shapes the priorities of the committee and through them the services and improvements we make.
77. Throughout 2022-23 we have increasingly seen awareness and engagement in corporate parenting delivery on a cross council basis. Our Care Celebration in October 2022 was attended by the Chief Executive, Strategic Director for Children and Adults, the Mayor of Southwark, Lead Member for Children, Young People and Education as well as multiple Elected Members who are members of the Corporate Parenting Committee. The recent event in November 2023 similarly was well supported.
78. We have also developed a cross-council pool of Care Leaver's Mentors in 2022-23 and now have representation from multiple divisions across Council including in the environment, commissioning and housing.

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

79. In 2023-24 with children in care and care leavers we will be developing Talfourd Place as a hub for children in care and care leavers. We know that there is a great amount of capacity and desire from all parts of the council to invest time and support to work with and help our children develop and thrive, by developing and naming the location for that support offer we are confident we can better mobilise and harness that potential across the council and our partners.

## **The work of the Corporate Parenting Committee**

80. The council's 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.
81. The committee champions the voice and experience of children in care and care leavers who attended every committee meeting in 2022-23. Children and young people are active participants in driving the agenda and discussions of the committee. They have grown in confidence, raising 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.
82. The committee takes a thematic approach to looking in depth at the key issues impacting on the life chances of care experienced children and young people.

## **Housing**

83. The committee explored the housing needs of care leavers and has been critical in driving cross-council approaches and policy changes to better support care leavers to access and be secure in housing, such as reforms to Housing prioritisation and council tax relief.
84. The committee heard the experience of young people in semi-independent accommodation and challenged the council about how it drives quality in commissioned providers. Specifically how our young people want to live in accommodation that promotes trust and accountability amongst them so that they feel ownership of their accommodation and develop the skills and personal responsibilities that support them to thrive in independence.
85. The committee helped to define a broad vision for quality semi-independent accommodation for care leavers which is driving our commissioning approach and supporting decisions in the creation of new accommodation in partnership with our main providers. This included accommodation in which young people feel secure and safe; that they feel they have independence and privacy, but within an environment of trusted support that they can be confident in securing advice and guidance when they need too; that promotes planning for future life and the move into independence; and most importantly where they feel listened to and able to influence and make decisions.

## **Health**

86. The provision of good quality health support is a regular topic of discussion for the committee. Challenging partnership providers to go above and beyond to meet the needs of our children and young people.
87. The committee has recognised the particular challenges faced by our children and young people in recovering from the pandemic and the impact this has had on their emotional and mental health and wellbeing. The Annual Health Report 2022-23 provided the committee the opportunity to hold the partnership to account for delivery and to agree recommendations for further improvement in support for our children.
88. The Designated Doctor for Looked After Children, Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children, Looked after Children and the Virtual Mental Health Lead for Looked After Children report regularly to the committee to provide assurance on service performance and the issues facing the system impacting on their ability to meet need.
89. The committee has focused particularly on the developmental and mental health needs of children in care. Challenges from the committee to continuously improve the quality of support on emotional wellbeing of our children has driven the service to innovate. The Council have invested in the implementation of the Child & Adolescent Needs and Strengths Framework (CANS) to assist our understanding of our children's needs, making Southwark the first authority in the United Kingdom to adopt this innovative new tool developed in the United States.

## **Education & employment**

90. The committee monitors the effectiveness of support for children's education and their outcomes through the work of the Virtual School.
91. The committee has particularly focused on how services can better support children who face difficulty with accessing education and those who are persistently absent from education settings. Services have been challenged to work closer together to both ensure children are back in education as quickly as possible when they move between placements, and also to make sure that wraparound provision and tuition is in place for those children who aren't in school to make sure that they continue to receive good educational opportunity.
92. Through the Virtual School the committee maintained oversight of the Covid Recovery Programme which was swift with a shift in practice designed to close the education gap created through the pandemic. Bespoke personal education plans, digital resources, educational psychology and speech and language support were all put in place, as well as increases in supplementary tuition.

93. In championing system improvement for employment of care leavers the committee held a themed workshop on education and employment facilitated by young people that developed an action plan. This had seven identified points of action to improve employment chances of our young people: *wellbeing; champions; paid internship/work experience; apprenticeships; guaranteed shortlisting/interview scheme; mentors; and a safe affordable home*. The committee identified individual leads and has begun to further influence cross council policy such as the new approach to guaranteed interviews for care experienced candidates.

### **Fostering and placement sufficiency**

94. The committee has responsibility for oversight of the council's sufficiency strategy and the plans of services to ensure that all our children have the opportunity to live in the right placement commensurate with their needs and that there is a sufficiently broad capacity available to match individual requirements of our children and young people.
95. The committee heard the challenges facing the recruitment and retention of foster carers, and the impact on our existing carers, of the cost of living crisis. The committee has provided input and challenge to the service in the development of the foster carer training and development offer and been critical in developing service improvement intentions, in particular the plans to develop more therapeutic support carers, the professionalization of foster carers, and plans to develop more communities of peer support across our carer population.
96. In March 2023 the committee agreed the new Children in Care and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2023-2026 which sets out understanding of the drivers of placement demand, and identifies the requirements and intentions to ensure sufficient placements for children in care and care leavers. It describes our route map for ensuring sufficiency of accommodation and support for children in and leaving care.

### **Quality of practice and services**

97. 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.
98. The Annual IRO Report was received by the Committee in March 2023 and 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 Officers Service whose role 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.

99. This includes performance in regularly reviewing the individual care plans of children and holding social workers to account for properly capturing and representing the views, experiences and ambitions of individual children in their plans with them.

### **Listening, and bringing our care experienced children together**

100. The council and particularly the committee has always been proud of championing the voice of children and young people and celebrating their achievements. Our Care Leaver Steering Group and Speakerbox, is well supported by two full time Children's Rights Officers (CRO) and additional support from strategic leaders within our Care and Care Leaver Service, and our Quality Assurance and Practice Development Service.
101. The services through the CROs are tasked with ensuring the voice of care experienced children and young people is influencing strategic and senior leadership activity, engagement and decisions. For example they support all young people attending all committees, preparing them to ensure they are able to get the messages across they want to. They were involved in recruitment for the Chief Executive and are involved in all senior recruitment within the Children & Families Division now includes a Speakerbox stakeholder panel.
102. In October 2022 we held our annual Children in Care Celebration. The annual Care Celebration honours the achievements of children in care and care leavers with categories that include Care Leaver of the Year Award, Community Champion Award, Education Award, Music Award and Outstanding Achievement Award. The event is organised by the Care and Care Leaver Service, Virtual School and Speakerbox. The ideas and input of children and young people shapes the event. In 2022 it was fantastic and was attended by the Chief Executive, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education, the Southwark Mayor and many elected members from the committee. This is really valued by young people.
103. Another annual event co-produced with our children and young people is our Big Picnic. This was held in a local Southwark park on a Saturday in the summer for all children in care, The event was a great chance for siblings who may not live together to meet up and connect with each other. There are lots of ART opportunities run by the South London Gallery and other creative projects, as well as food and fun games and sporting activities. A real highlight is seeing children, foster carers and social worker connect over games and food in a really informal and fun setting.
104. Speakerbox also 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 our extremely talented care leavers. The idea for this project came from a care leaver who is the current chair of Speakerbox.

105. The Care Leaver Steering Group and Speakerbox, has plans for 2023-24 to bring more cross-council participation in planning and delivering events and activities, mobilizing the wealth of positive will, skills and areas of interest that exist in all Council departments to broadening opportunity. A number of areas have been identified including support from the Technology and Digital Service on IT skills and our parks teams on learning to grow and care for our natural environment.

### **Our priorities for 2023-24**

106. As our Corporate Parenting Strategy enters its final year of delivery our priority for the year are to continue to deliver against those areas we still have work to do to achieve the ambitions set out in that strategy, as well as initiating our work to refresh our strategy for the next years through to 2030.

107. In addition to this we have a number of specific priorities that are to be delivered in 2023-24:

- *Southwark Homes for Southwark Children* - Preparing to open the first Southwark Children's Home so more children can live locally to the borough. Continuing to recruit more local foster carers for Southwark children to live locally to attend the excellent local school and be closer to their friends and family. This programme will be led by establishing a Southwark Homes for Southwark Children Board.
- *Stability and support* – We have seen significant challenges in placement stability for our children in 2022-23 we will be launching a new action plan to turn this around improving stability for all children in care both measures short- term and long-term.
- *Development of a Hub in collaboration with Children in Care and Care Leavers* - Development of Talfourd Place as a Care Experienced Young Person's Hub co-designed with young people and with input and commitment from across the Council to the focus of being the best possible Corporate Parent.
- *Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessment (CANS)* – The implementation of our new approach to better understanding the needs of our children. 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. This strength based approach will be incorporated into profiles for children seeking a new home and into the stability template.
- *Care Leavers Pledge* – Undertake work to renew the council's pledge for care leavers. Working with the Care Leaver Covenant implementing across the Council Assembly motion and exploring the opportunities this affords us in accelerating the whole council and partnership offer to our children.



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

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

### **Policy implications**

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

### **Financial implications**

110. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

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

#### **Community impact statement**

111. The decision to note this report has been judged to have a small but important impact on local people and communities. The work relating to children in care and care leavers is intended to improve the outcomes for them.

112. 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.

113. 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.

114. 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 their racial ethnic background and considers these areas in light of commitments set out by Southwark Stands Together.

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

115. 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 care being strongly correlated with the numbers of children in care.
116. Children from black/black British and mixed/multiple global majority groups are 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.
117. Of the group of children in our care at the end of March 2023, 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.
118. 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.
119. 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.

## **Climate change implications**

120. There are no relevant climate change implications

## **Social Value considerations**

121. There are no relevant social value considerations

## **Economic considerations**

122. There are no relevant economic considerations

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Documents	Held At	Contact
Corporate Parenting Strategy	160 Tooley Street London SE1 2QH	Michael Crowe 0207 525 5000
<b>Link (please copy and paste into browser):</b> <a href="https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s99637/Appendix%201%20Draft%20Corporate%20Parenting%20Strategy%202021-2024.pdf">https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s99637/Appendix%201%20Draft%20Corporate%20Parenting%20Strategy%202021-2024.pdf</a>		

## APPENDICES

No	Title
None	

## AUDIT TRAIL

<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Jasmine Ali, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education	
<b>Lead Officer</b>	David Quirke-Thornton, Strategic Director of Children's and Adults' Services	
<b>Report Author</b>	Michael Crowe, Service Development Manager – Children & Families	
<b>Version</b>	Final	
<b>Dated</b>	4 January 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>
Strategic Director of Finance	No	No
Head of Procurement	No	No
Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance	No	No
<b>Contract Review Boards</b>		
Departmental Contract Review Board	No	No
Corporate Contract Review Board	No	No
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>		4 January 2024