

<b>Item No.</b> 7.	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 16 April 2024	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Corporate Parenting Committee
<b>Report title:</b>		Brief report: Lifelong Links implementation	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>From:</b>		Director of Children Services for Children and Families Directorate	

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the corporate parenting committee note the Lifelong Links programme and its implementation for children in the care of the council, or those formerly who are care leavers, as part of the Department for Education (DfE) family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes.
2. That the corporate parenting committee note the inclusion of people with lived experience of social work within the Lifelong Links implementation, including children and young people, care leavers, parents and carers.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. Lifelong Links was established by the Family Rights Group (FRG) to enable children in care and care leavers to develop positive networks who can offer them support throughout their time in care and well into adulthood. The [Lifelong Links embedding practice briefing paper](#) highlights *“Lifelong Links supports the concept of relational stability, with the recognition that relationships can continue beyond placements, and that foster carers and birth family members can work collaboratively.”*
4. Previously piloted during 2017-2020, the [Lifelong Links evaluation report](#) found that on average, children and young people who accessed a Lifelong Links intervention, increased their social networks (family, friends and connections with previous professionals) from 7 to 26 people. The report concluded that there was a significant positive impact on children’s stability following a Lifelong Links intervention, with 74% remaining living in their foster care or children’s home placement a year later compared with 41% of children who did not receive the intervention. An improved sense of identity and increased number of family and friends' connections was also noted.
5. Southwark Council was part of this pilot, however, due to a number of difficulties with the delivery model this was only able to benefit a small number of children. Subsequently, the Lifelong Links offer evolved into

the Reconnect offer focusing on connecting children in care with specific people. Again, this was only able to benefit a small number of children, approximately 10 per year.

6. In July 2023 the DfE launched the [family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes](#), with the council successful in its bid to be part of this. The council was awarded funding to deliver Lifelong Links to 20 children and young people before March 2024, and 56 children and young people during 2024-2025. To achieve this, a Lifelong Links Team is being created, sitting within the Family Group Conferencing Service overseen by the FGC Lead. The team will comprise of a team manager, social worker, project officer and clinician, complimented by freelance Lifelong Links FGC Coordinators, who undertake direct interventions with children and young people in line with the Lifelong Links operational model.

## **KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **What has been achieved so far?**

7. Our first report to the DfE has been submitted, detailing our progress across the initial implementation period.
8. A Lifelong Links steering group has been created, meeting regularly to provide strategic oversight for implementation and chaired by the Assistant Director for Quality Assurance and Practice Development. Membership of the steering group consists of a cross section of practitioners from across Children's Services alongside representation from family advocates and the Children's Rights Officer. Young people with lived experience, foster carers, and parent's representatives are being sought to join this group. The steering group is complimented by a Practice Development Group, which meets on a monthly basis to action any required workstreams.
9. Recruitment to the Lifelong Links team has been agreed, with funding available via the DfE grant. Recruitment to these posts is in progress, with the clinician having been appointed, with a start date in April 2024. Whilst we await appointment to the remaining posts as an interim measure Julie Campbell, Audit and Learning Lead has been providing support to Lifelong Links.
10. Thirteen referrals for Lifelong Links intervention have been received thus far. The demographics of the children and young people are:
  - I. 46% identify as male and 54% as female
  - II. 46% are White British, 54% are from global majority ethnicities.
  - III. Ages range from 10 – 23yrs, with the majority (54%) aged 18yrs and over.

- IV. 6 are open to intervention from the Care Leaver service, 5 from Care, 1 from SFS and 1 is a former care leaver. Of these, 1 young person is in custody.
11. Twelve of these referrals have been accepted – a conversion rate of 92%, with most (10/12) having been allocated to a Lifelong Links Coordinator. Of these, four initial planning meetings have been held, meaning there are four children / young people actively receiving Lifelong Links intervention at the current time.
  12. A further five children and young people have been offered a consultation around Lifelong Links, to ascertain whether this intervention would be suitable.
  13. We have been able to utilise our existing pool of FGC Coordinators, many of whom have prior experience of being a Lifelong Links FGC Coordinator and have offered them refresher training via Family Rights Groups. One of our Coordinators is also care experienced, bringing their knowledge and skills directly to their interventions with our children and young people.

#### **What are our ongoing priorities?**

14. The next DfE reporting period is in April 2024, whereby we will need to detail our continued progress.
15. Job adverts for the team manager, social worker and project officer are being finalised, with recruitment hoped to take place in April 2024. Consequently, it is likely team members will be in post by summer 2024.
16. We aim to maximize opportunities for people with lived experience of social work to be involved in the implementation and delivery of Lifelong Links. To do so, we are in the process of recruiting a foster carer to the steering group and considering how we can include children and young people within this forum also. We would also like to expand opportunities to our care experienced community to become a Lifelong Links FGC Coordinators in the future.
17. We need to ensure referrals for Lifelong Links intervention maintain momentum. A further 23 children and young people have been identified via various cohorts (those who are in custody, living in residential accommodation or who may have previously been known to Reconnect) and have been highlighted to the Care and Care Leaver services.

## **Policy implications**

18. The Children Act (1989) states (Schedule 2, paragraph 15) “*The Local Authority has a duty to promote contact between a child and their parents, plus any important people in their lives*”. Lifelong Links helps us achieve this for children in care and care leavers, connecting them with their extended networks, not just those they are biologically related to, to promote these relationships, expand their support networks and provide a stronger sense of Identity.
19. The Government’s ‘stable homes, built on love’ strategy for children's social care (2023) also highlights the need for “*children in care and care leavers to identify and connect with the important people in their lives and create safe, stable, loving relationships*” with the [family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes](#) being integral to helping Local Authorities achieve this goal for children and young people within their communities.

## **Financial implications**

20. The financial implications are met by the DfE funding, from securing a successful bid to implement Lifelong Links within the borough.

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

### **Community impact statement**

21. 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.
22. 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.
23. 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.

24. 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 care leavers, as well as their racial ethnic background and considers these areas in light of commitments set out by Southwark Stands Together.

### **Health impact statement**

25. The longitudinal child level analysis of Lifelong Links shows that emotional health and well-being appear to improved and that the improvement is sustained over time (as measured by the Strengths & Difficulties questionnaire) for children in care and care leavers who have access to these interventions.

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

26. 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 supporting our children in care and care leavers seeks to address these inequalities and this paper is about addressing inequality via Lifelong Links interventions.

### **Climate change implications**

27. There are no relevant climate change implications

### **Resource implications**

28. Any resource implications will be met by the DfE funding.

### **Legal implications**

29. There are no relevant legal implications.

### **Consultation**

30. There is no consultation required.

## **SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS**

### **Assistant Chief Executive of Governance and Assurance**

31. A concurrent is not required.

## Strategic Director of Finance

32. A concurrent is not required.

## Other officers

33. There are none.

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes	Children and Families Directorate, 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Tendai Murowe 020 7525 0486
<b>Link:</b> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-finding-befriending-and-mentoring-funding-for-programmes/family-finding-befriending-and-mentoring-programmes-application-guide-for-local-authorities">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-finding-befriending-and-mentoring-funding-for-programmes/family-finding-befriending-and-mentoring-programmes-application-guide-for-local-authorities</a>		
Lifelong Links embedding practice briefing paper	Children and Families Directorate, 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Tendai Murowe 020 7525 0486
<b>Link:</b> <a href="https://huddersfield.app.box.com/s/2yqpiz5t5hn9u6n6jc923fd4b40wua57">https://huddersfield.app.box.com/s/2yqpiz5t5hn9u6n6jc923fd4b40wua57</a>		
Lifelong Links evaluation report	Children and Families Directorate, 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Tendai Murowe 020 7525 0486
<b>Link:</b> <a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60104f74d3bf7f05c3182253/Lifelong_Links_evaluation_report.pdf">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60104f74d3bf7f05c3182253/Lifelong_Links_evaluation_report.pdf</a>		
Children Act (1989)	Children and Families Directorate, 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Tendai Murowe 020 7525 0486
<b>Link:</b> <a href="https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents">https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents</a>		
Equalities Act 2010: S149 Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)	Children and Families Directorate, 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Tendai Murowe 020 7525 0486

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
<p><b>Link:</b> <a href="https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149">https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149</a></p>		
Strengths & Difficulties questionnaire	Children and Families Directorate, 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Tendai Murowe 020 7525 0486
<p><b>Link:</b> <a href="https://mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/the-strengths-and-difficulties-questionnaire-sdq/">https://mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/the-strengths-and-difficulties-questionnaire-sdq/</a></p>		
Council Assembly, 25 November 2020, Item 6.1 Refresh of the Council Plan 2018 - 2022 – Appendix A	Children and Families Directorate, 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Tendai Murowe 020 7525 0486
<p><b>Link:</b> <a href="https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s92006/Appendix%20A%20Southwarks%20Borough%20Plan%202020.pdf">https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s92006/Appendix%20A%20Southwarks%20Borough%20Plan%202020.pdf</a></p>		
Council Assembly, 14 July 2021, Item 6.1 constitutional changes: Climate Emergency and Equality, Council assembly role and functions – Appendix 3 PART 3B Cabinet Role	Children and Families Directorate, 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Tendai Murowe 020 7525 0486
<p><b>Link:</b> <a href="https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s99855/Appendix%203%20-%20Part%203B%20Cabinet%20role.pdf">https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s99855/Appendix%203%20-%20Part%203B%20Cabinet%20role.pdf</a></p>		
Southwark Council's Delivery Plan, Appendix 1, Item 8 – Cabinet 17 October 2023	Children and Families Directorate, 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH	Tendai Murowe 02075250486
<p><b>Link:</b> <a href="https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s116779/Appendix%201%20Southwark%20Council%20Delivery%20Plan%20Annual%20Performance%20Report.pdf">https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s116779/Appendix%201%20Southwark%20Council%20Delivery%20Plan%20Annual%20Performance%20Report.pdf</a></p>		

## APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

## AUDIT TRAIL

<b>Lead Officer</b>	David Quirke-Thornton, Strategic Director of Children Services	
<b>Report Author</b>	Tendai Murowe, Assistant Director – Quality Assurance and Practice Development	
<b>Version</b>	Final	
<b>Dated</b>	8 April 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 of Governance and Assurance	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance	No	No
List other officers here	N/A	N/A
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	No	No
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>	8 April 2024	