

LONDON BOROUGH OF SOUTHWARK

CARING TO CARE: ACHIEVING
EXCELLENCE FOR OUR
CHILDREN

**CORPORATE PARENTING
STRATEGY
2021-2024**

FOREWORD - A FAIRER FUTURE FOR OUR CHILDREN

Foreword



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AN EXCELLENT 'CORPORATE' PARENT

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 set out in law the core principles of excellent corporate parenting and a challenge for every authority in the country to be the best parent they can be for our children and young people.

Corporate parenting means the whole local authority, its public and private sector partners, taking collective responsibility to achieve the outcomes for our children in care and young adults that we would want to see for our own children - achieving the age old duty of making sure our children's lives are always better, more successful and happier than our own.

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 Corporate Parenting Principles set out in the Act are:

- 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 children and young people for adulthood and independent living.



PRINCIPLES

CORPORATE PARENTING IS EVERYONES RESPONSIBILITY

There is no bigger responsibility on individuals than to raise our children well, and no more important duty on society than to raise the children in our care just as well. If you live, work, lead an organisation or business, or invest in Southwark, you are every much a part of parenting our children as a foster carer or social worker.

Whether you are a leader or a frontline worker, delivering for children in our care and our young adults is all our responsibility, ask yourselves these questions:

ORGANISATIONS

- Does your organisation recognise the corporate parenting principles, are these embedded in your policies, plans and strategies?
- Does your organisation actively support opportunities for our children and young adults?
- Are your services properly prioritising the needs of our children and young adults?
- Are you championing the voice and experience of our children and young people in your wider communities and sectors?

INDIVIDUALS

- Are you looking for ways you can provide opportunities for our children and young adults?
- Do you know about the issues and needs of our children and young adults?
- Do you know how you can connect with services to offer support and opportunity?
- Are you aspirational and ambitious for our children and young adults?
- Do you share that ambition with your colleagues, teams and communities?



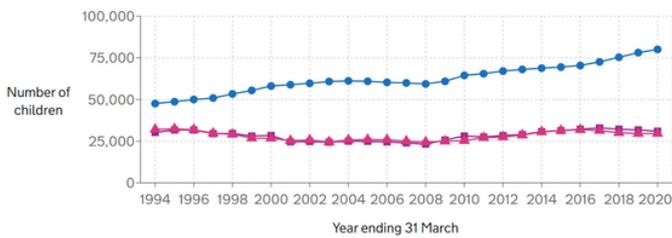
RESPONSIBILITY

CONTEXT: CHILDREN IN CARE

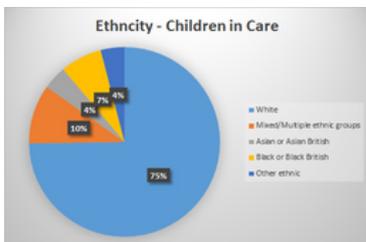
National Context - Children in Care

The number of children in care nationally has risen by approximately 25% in the last 10 years to 80,080.

Children looked after at 31 March, children starting to be looked after during the year and children ceasing to be looked after during the year, in England, 1994 to 2020

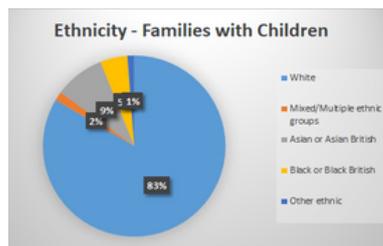


The single largest determining factor for children entering care is where they have experienced abuse or neglect (65%).



The majority of children in care are from a white background.

However, the national care population is disproportionately made up of children from mixed, black or other ethnic backgrounds.

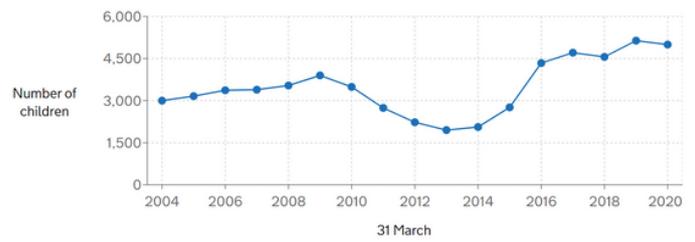


Most children live with foster carers (58%), of those that don't:

- 14% live with relatives or friends
- 13% are in residential accommodation
- 7% are living with their parents
- 3% live independently
- 5% are in other arrangements, such as awaiting adoption or in legal custody.

The majority of children live within 20 miles of home (73%).

Children looked after at 31 March who were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, 2004 to 2020



In addition, the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children has increased by 143% since 2014.

National Context - Outcomes

Whilst many children who have been in care lead positive and happy lives, it is undeniable that outcomes for children who have been in care remain significantly poorer than their peers;

- **25%** of the homeless population have been in care at some point in their lives
- Almost **25%** of the adult prison population have previously been in care, and nearly **50%** of under 21-year-olds in contact with the criminal justice system have spent time in care.
- **22%** of female care leavers become teenage parents
- Those who have been in care are between four and five times more likely to self-harm in adulthood.
- **39%** of care leavers aged 19-21 years were known not to be in education, employment, or training (NEET), compared to around 13% of all 19- to 21-year-olds
- Two thirds of all looked after children have at least one physical health complaint
- Almost half (49%) of children looked after had 'normal' emotional and behavioural health, 13% had 'borderline' scores and **38%** had scores which were a cause for concern.

OUR CHILDREN



At the end of 2020/21 **449** children were in our care. This means 69 children in every 10,000 in Southwark. **38** of our children came to us as seeking asylum.

In the year **126** children came into our care, and **173** left our care, **47** of those children returned home to live with their families.



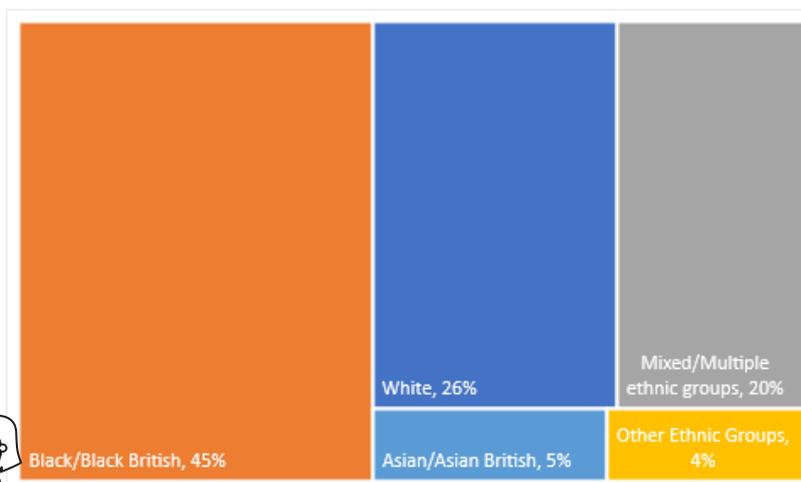
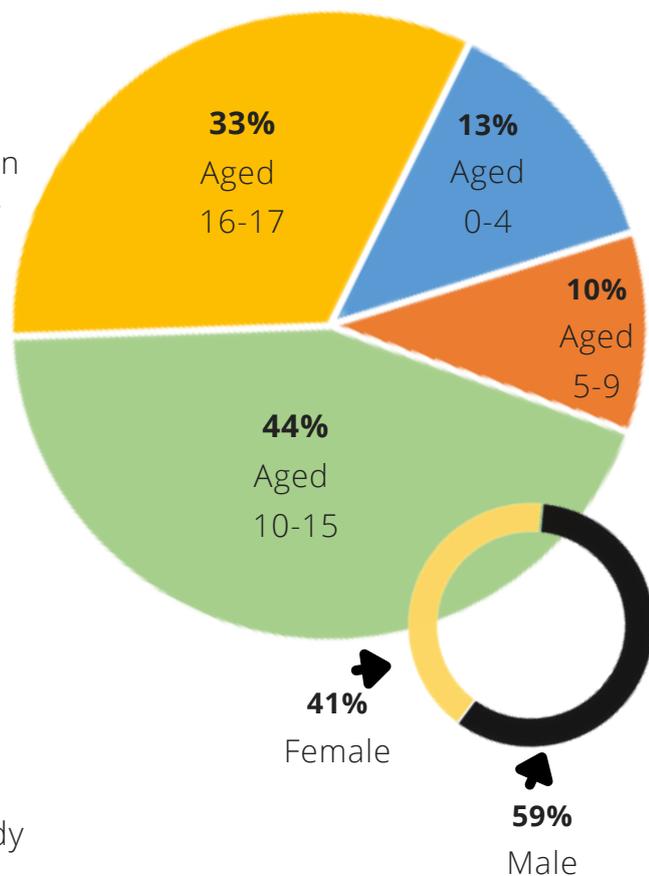
Most of our children are cared for by foster parents (**77%**). Another **10%** live in residential accommodation, **8%** are already living independently.

We are continuing to support **216** children who are cared for by Special Guardians....

....And **545** young adults who have left our care in the last few years.



78% of our children live in or close to Southwark



OUR CHILDREN



OUR CHILDREN

In 2019, **33%** of our children reached the expected standard in reading, writing and maths in both Key Stage 1 & Key Stage 2.



28% of all our school age children have a recognised special educational need.

The Average & Attainment Score for our children was **24.2** in 2019, against a national average of 19 for all children in care.

95% of our children attend schools that are rated Good or Better by Ofsted.

5% of our children are recognised as having a substance abuse problem



98% of our children have up to date health assessments, **91%** are up to date in their immunisations

89% of our young adults are living in suitable accommodation

36% of our children have SDQ scores that evidence concerns about their emotional wellbeing

65% of our young adults are in Education, Employment or Training. Compared to 53% nationally. **6%** are in Higher Education.



92% of our children who have been assessed by CAMHs Teams have experience 4 or more Adverse Childhood Experiences

93% of our Young Adults are still in regular contact with our services, and **15%** are still living with their former foster carers.



OUR CHILDREN

WHAT YOU'VE TOLD US

"WE WANT TO SEE OUR SIBLINGS, AND WE WANT TO GET TO KNOW OUR WIDER FAMILIES"

"WE WANT TO KNOW WHERE WE ARE GOING TO LIVE FOR THE FUTURE, AND WE WANT TO STAY WHERE WE'RE HAPPY"

"WE WANT TO MEET OUR CARERS BEFORE WE MOVE"

" WE WANT TO TRUSTED AND HAVE THE CHANCE TO SHOW WE CAN BE"

"WE ENJOY HAVING HOBBIES AND THINGS TO DO OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL"

"BEING TAUGHT SKILLS TO MAKE US INDEPENDENT IS IMPORTANT"

"WE CAN EASILY GET IN TOUCH WITH OUR SOCIAL WORKERS, WHICH IS IMPORTANT TO US"

"MOST OF THE TIME WE UNDERSTAND THE REASONS WHY WE ARE IN CARE, BUT NOT ALWAYS"

"WE'D LIKE TO BE MORE INCLUDED IN DECISIONS ABOUT OUR LIVES AND TO KNOW EXACTLY WHATS GOING ON"

"SOMETIMES WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT OUR FEELINGS, THIS ISN'T ALWAYS NOTICED, BUT WHEN IT IS WE DO GET HELP TO COPE WITH OUR WORRIES"

"SINCE WE LEFT CARE WE DON'T FEEL AS CLOSE TO SOMEONE WE TRUST AS WE USED TO, WI WOULD LOVE TO HAVE FRIENDS TO TRUST AND DO ACTIVITIES WITH, IT CAN BE QUITE LONELY"

"TOO MANY OF US FEEL QUITE LOW WHEN WE'VE LEFT CARE, WE SOMETIMES FEEL UNSAFE AND UNSETTLED AT HOME AND IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD, AND WORRY ABOUT OUR FINANCES"

"MOST OF US GET INVOLVED IN OUR PLANS, BUT NOT ENOUGH OF US ARE FULLY INVOLVED, AND GETTING OUR SAY"

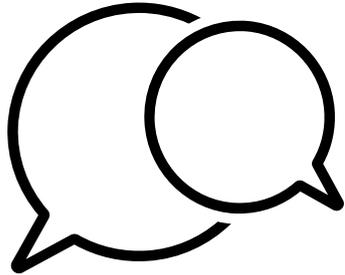
"OUR SOCIAL WORKERS WERE OFTEN THE SAME, BUT WE'D LIKE OUR LEAVING CARE WORKERS TO BE MORE CONSISTENT"

"LOTS OF US HAVE GOOD PLACES TO LIVE, BUT THAT NEEDS TO BE THE SAME FOR EVERYONE"



THE VOICE OF OUR CHILDREN

Hearing and responding to the thoughts, feelings and experiences of our children and young people is paramount. We will use this strategy to engage our young people in how best to achieve what they want us to, how we can improve our services and how we develop new approaches, plans and services to better meet their needs, goals and aspirations.



Speaker Box

Speaker Box is our primary forum for engaging our children, young people and young adults. Its a forum where they can meet peers, talk about their experiences and challenge the Council on our delivery and practice. The forum runs a range of different activities, consultations and projects to get involved in.

Our young people regularly attend and hold workshops at the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee.

But we know we need to do more to systematically gather the views and thoughts of our children from the many times and places we talk and engage with them. In their reviews, when we plan with them, and when we plan for their education. All of these opportunities give us valuable insight and we can embed this in our service design and improvement to truly capture and represent the voice of all our children and young adults.

DELIVERING OUR STRATEGY

This strategy has been developed based on the evidence and experiences we have now, we know there is always more to do to understand better and work closer with our children and young people to develop our plans and services. We know that life moves fast and the pandemic and issues in society are changing our children and young adults stories quicker than ever before. There are new causes for celebration and new challenges every day.

We want this Strategy to live, to evolve and to change alongside and by always learning from our children and young people. We need to be adaptable and we need to be prepared to re-prioritise when our children tell us too.

Our Corporate Parenting Committee is the driving force behind that approach and our strategy. Chaired by the Deputy Leader of the Council, and Lead Member for Children and Young People and attended by a wide range of Elected Members, Partners and most importantly our children and young adults themselves. The committee has a responsibility to ensure that the life chances of looked after children are maximised in every area and to aid the transition to a secure and productive adulthood.

We will report regularly on our activities, our progress and our impact to the Committee and most importantly to all of our children, young people and young adults.

OUR VISION FOR OUR CHILDREN

Southwark Council is committed to its vision of building a ***fairer future for all in Southwark.***

We will do this by delivering on our core values to;

- Treat residents as if they were a valued member of our own family;
- Be open, honest and accountable;
- Work for everyone to realise their own potential;
- Spend money as if it were from our own pocket;
- Make Southwark a place to be proud of;
- Always work to make Southwark more equal and just;
- Stand against all forms of discrimination and racism.

Our vision of a fairer future for our children and young adults is 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.

This vision is true for all children and young people in Southwark, and is critical for those children in our care and the young adults who have been in our care.

A FAIRER FUTURE FOR OUR CHILDREN

A ***fairer future*** for our children means;

Safe

- More children being able to remain at home
- Reducing involvement with the criminal justice system
- Reducing the impact of exploitation and extra-familial harm on our children; and our children telling us they feel safe at home and in the community.



Healthy

- All children accessing appropriate mental health support
- All children regularly accessing healthy leisure activities
- All children being up to date on their assessments and checks; and our children telling us they feel and are healthy.



Happy

- All children in a stable home, with a trusted relationship with those who care for them
- Every child accessing an opportunity to learn, train and work that meets their aspirations
- Reducing instances of substance misuse; and our children telling us they feel happy.



This is how we create the opportunity for our children to reach their potential

OUR 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.

01

02

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.

03



OUR
PRIORITIES

OUR PRIORITIES

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.

04

05

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.

06

OUR
PRIORITIES



DELIVERING OUR PRIORITIES

01

SUPPORTING MORE FAMILIES TO SAFELY STAY TOGETHER

In previous years we have invested heavily in our edge of care services to support children to remain at home where it is safe for them to do so. Since 2016 we have successfully reduced the rate of children in our care from 76 per 10,000 to 66. This means 45 more children have been supported to remain at home. We have also increased the percentage of children who are living with friends and relatives from 7% to 14%.

We will:

- 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 reunification support offer to ensure when children return home they are able to do so sustainably and that more children are supported to return home.

02

GROWING UP SAFE AND INDEPENDENT IN SOCIETY

In the UK the average child now leaves home around the age of 25. Our children and young people already face significant challenges in growing to independence. There is rising complexity in our communities, rising risks of exploitation, and increasing difficulty for young people across the country, in housing, employment and managing independence. All of these issues have been exacerbated by one of the most difficult years society has faced in generations. Now more than ever its essential that our children are given all the skills and support they need to thrive independently.

We will:

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

DELIVERING OUR PRIORITIES

04 HAPPY, SAFE AND STABLE

03

HEALTH, WELLBEING, EDUCATION & OPPORTUNITY

As a central London Borough, Southwark is rich in connections to some of the best resources in the Country. We have dedicated partners who recognise and prioritise the needs of our children and young people. There is no reason why the gap between health, education and life outcomes for children who have been in care cannot be closed with their peers.

We will:

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

The messages from our children could not be more unequivocal, what really matters to them is stability, knowing where they will live, and who with, and that they are trusted and respected.

We have made good progress in recent years in improving stability for our children, we have enhanced the offer of our clinical services to support stability and we have invested in our care and leaving care services to provide consistency. But we can and must always do more and better.

We will:

- 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.

DELIVERING OUR PRIORITIES

05

IDENTITY & BELONGING

Our children and young people have spoken to us in powerful terms about their desire to be connected to their own personal histories, of the importance of links to their siblings and wider families, and more broadly about the importance of addressing their concerns about their cultural identity and addressing structural inequality across the system.

We will:

- 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.

06

A WHOLE BOROUGH THAT 'CARES TO CARE'

The council's has plans to invest £1bn over the next ten years, in local development initiatives, has an annual turnover of £1.2bn and spends approximately £650m a year with external contractors. It is home to over 15,000 businesses, including some of the largest and most prominent private and public sector organisations, educational and cultural institutions in the Country. Embedding the corporate parenting principles across the Borough has the potential to be truly transformative for our children and young people.

We will:

- 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.