

London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2019/20

Councillor Worby

Chair of CPG; Lead Member for Social Care and Health Integration

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Director of People and Resilience (Director of Children's Services)



September 2020

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Foreword

As Lead Member for Social Care and Health Integration and Chair of the Corporate Parenting Group, I am delighted to introduce the 2019/20 Annual Report of Barking and Dagenham's Members Corporate Parenting Group (MCPG).

2019/20 has been another busy year with many key achievements and improved outcomes for our children in care and care leavers. The MCPG has focused its attention on the Ofsted Inspection carried out in February 2019 and kept a close eye on the subsequent LBBDD Ofsted improvement plan to ensure changes have been made with performance and outcomes improving.

The work of the MCPG has also concentrated on delivering the promises we have made to our children in care and care leavers. We are ambitious for children and young people and want them to lead happy, safe and successful lives.

Our children in care council is pivotal to the work of the MCPG and we have strengthened their voice and participation in 2019/20. We highly value listening to our children and young people and want them to be at the heart of service improvement.

This Annual Report provides an overview of what we are doing well, our key achievements in the last year, what are our key challenges and our plans to address those challenges in 2020/21 and beyond. The report presents activity and performance data from 2019/20 and identifies the Board's plans and priorities for the year ahead.

We know we still have a lot to do to improve the lives of our children and young people in care and care leavers, but with our stronger invigorated MCPG and as committed Corporate Parents, we are relentless in our ambition to achieve this.

Councillor Maureen Worby
Chair of the Corporate Parenting Group

Introduction and background

The concept of Corporate Parenting was first introduced in the Children Act 1989 and describes the responsibilities of the Council to provide the best possible care for our children in care and care leavers, as any good parent would do for their children.

Elected Members have a lead role in ensuring that the Council acts as an effective Corporate Parent and have high aspirations for our children and young people to improve their life chances.

Corporate Parenting has been reinvigorated with strengthened arrangements in the last 18 months and are working well with our Lead Member as Chair.

Group membership for our Corporate Parenting Board has been reviewed and all new members have been fully inducted, each committing to uphold and deliver the key promises made to our children and young people in care and Care Leavers. The Board is now well attended, offers challenge and holds all members to account in their role in delivering a quality service. The Board has played a key role in delivering the Enhanced Local Offer.

Our MCPG meets on a bi-monthly basis and in addition to Members, includes representatives from Children's Social Care, Health, Virtual School, representatives from the Children in Care Council (Skittlz), Director of Community Solutions and a Foster Carer representative. The Forward Plan and agendas are set by the MCPG led by young people ensuring our young people in care and Care Leavers are instrumental in the priorities going forward. Young people are represented on the Board and all Board members are expected to attend the training session led by Care Leavers.

The Promises made to our children in care and Care Leavers were refreshed two years ago and remain the focus of the MCPG to shape the Council being the best parent we can be to those we are responsible for. Progress on the Promises is outlined later in this report.

About the Borough

Barking and Dagenham is a young and increasingly diverse borough. The population was estimated to be 212,906 in 2019: an increase of 28% over the last 15 years and 9% over the last five years. National statistics project the population to increase to 237,000 by 2025 and 250,000 by 2030 (ONS subnational population projections migration assumptions 2018).

Alongside population increases, Barking and Dagenham has become a more diverse borough with 66% of the resident population now estimated to be from Black and minority ethnic (BME) ethnic minorities compared with 19% in 2001.

The borough has a higher health and social care need compared to other boroughs, with higher rates of referrals and a higher social care utilisation than London and England averages. Life expectancy is lower than the London average for both males and females in the borough.

We are among the most deprived local authorities in England: 17th highest in England and the highest in London (IMD 2019). Unemployment remains high at 6.1% - highest in London and the borough has 8.3% of residents with no qualifications - higher than London average (6.7%).

30% of households are rented from the local authority or a housing association, and 27% of dependent children in the borough live in a lone-parent household.

Our child population. We are a young borough, with around 63,400 children

and young people under the age of 18 - 30% of the total population, the highest proportion in the UK. The borough also has the largest proportion of children aged under 16 in London (27%).

74% of the 0–17 population are from ethnic minorities compared and the proportion of children and young people who speak English as an additional language is more than 2.5 times than the national average.

26% of children under 16 in the borough are living in low income families, an increasing proportion, and way above England average of 18%. The proportion of children entitled to free school meals in nursery and primary schools is on par with the national average, but the proportion in secondary schools is higher at 17% compared to 14% across England.

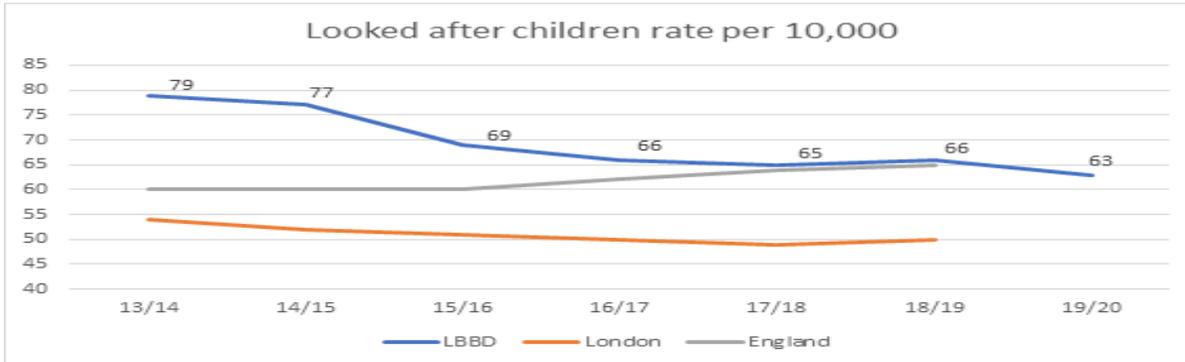
Domestic abuse is a significant issue in Barking and Dagenham and impacts on all service areas - 14.8 domestic abuse offences per 1,000 people - highest in London. It accounts for 37% of violence with injury offences in the borough and is a presenting factor for around 22% of children's social care contacts annually and rising.

This sits in a context of a stretched and challenged health and social care economy, which has struggled to keep pace with changing community needs including the fast-growing child population with increasing diversity, complexity and needs.

Since March 2020, COVID-19 has, and will continue to pose significant challenges for our community, children, young people and families and partner agencies across the board. Continuing to manage the impact of the pandemic will be a top priority for the Council and partner agencies throughout 2020/21.

Our Children in Care and Care Leavers

At the end of 2019/20, the number of children in care decreased to 402 compared to 417 in the previous year. This end-of-year position corresponds to a rate of 63 per 10,000 children, which, has been declining in recent years, but remains higher than the London rates but lower than national and statistical rates. During 2019/20, the number of new children coming into care decreased by 17 from 208 to 191, a decrease of 8% and 204 children left care.



Overall, this is positive when set against the growth in population and demand. The age profile of looked-after children is older than the national average with over two thirds of our children in care aged 10-17 and we have a higher proportion of 16-17-year olds in care compared to the national average.

White children are over-represented in Barking and Dagenham's children in care, comprising 51% of looked-after children at the end of 2019/20, (36% in the local under 18 population). Conversely, Black African and Asian children are under-represented, making up 21% and 11% of children in care, but 25%

and 22% of the under 18 population (2018). Male children are also over-represented, with 232 (58%) males and 170 (42%) females at the end of 2019/20. Of the 402 children in care at the end of 2019/20:

- 275 (68%) lived with foster and kinship carers
- 34 (9%) were in residential care
- 17 (4%) were placed with their parents
- 62 (15%) were in semi-independent placements
- 14 (3%) were placed for adoption

Of these 402 children, 38% were placed in the borough and 62% outside the borough comparable with the previous year.

During 2019/20, 15 children were adopted, the same as 2018/19, representing 7.4% of all children leaving care - above London, but below the national and similar areas averages. 33 children (16%) had become subject to special guardianship orders (SGOs) same as 2018/19, and higher than all comparators.

At the end of 2019/20, 245 young people 18 plus were care leavers, of which 82 were former UASC. This is an increase on the previous year from 207 care leavers (63 former UASC). The number of UASC aged under 18 decreased to 39 (0.06) at the end of 2019/20 compared to 44 (0.07) in 2018/19 and numbers remained below threshold set at 0.08.

Key achievements in 2019-20

Our key achievements led by the MCPG throughout 2019/20 are set out in this section followed by an evaluation of progress and impact against the children in care and care leavers promises.

Strong and effective senior leadership with an unrelenting focus on improving outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and their families. In the past two years, the DCS and the senior leadership team has led a reinvigoration of children's services across social care and beyond to drive a strong and strategic approach with an unrelenting focus on improving outcomes for children, and especially our most vulnerable. Much work has been completed to refocus strategic and operational governance and practice around the outcomes and experiences of children and families. Raising the bar on putting children and families first has resulted in getting greater corporate visibility and commitment to children's services, especially children's social care. This sits within the context of the DCS and our Lead Member and Chair of the MCPG taking a system leadership role to vigorously champion children both at the corporate and partnership boards, including Corporate Parenting.

The Council has also demonstrated commitment and ambition by significantly financially investing in Children's Care and Support by funding our 'Children's Improvement Programme'. This includes the Target Operating Model (TOM) for Children's Social Care including a Cabinet and Lead Member championed endorsement of a commitment to caseloads of 1:15. Good progress has been made in delivering the first phase of the Children's Improvement Programme in the last year, with all service restructures completed including a new Corporate Parenting and Permanence Service and Specialist Intervention Service. Our MCPG is fully supportive of the Improvement Programme and sighted on progress throughout the year.

Strengthened Council-commitment to Care Leavers being in suitable accommodation, improved housing offer and an increasing proportion are in education, training or employment. In July 2019, Cabinet agreed the enhanced Local Offer and Assembly agreed that Care Leavers resident in the borough will be exempted from Council Tax up to the age of 25, effective from April 2020. Our enhanced Local Offer and the exemption scheme were launched by the Chief Executive at the Care Leavers' annual awards ceremony held in

October 2019. The enhanced offers, alongside the Vulnerable Housing Panel (VHP) set up in 2019 and the multi agency NEET Panel are impacting on improving care leavers outcomes to above national, London and statistical neighbours.

Strong Virtual School achieving good outcomes. Our Virtual School is strong and demonstrating good outcomes in attainment, attendance, compliance and quality of PEPs. Children in care attainment at KS1, KS2 and GCSE is above the children in care national average, and overall absence from school and fixed-term exclusions for children in care remains below the national children in care averages. The majority of our children in care are in good or outstanding schools.

Strengthened strategic oversight and leadership to improve health outcomes for children in care and care leavers. There have been improvements both strategically and operationally in this priority area but with much still to do. Whilst a high proportion of children have up to date health assessments, initial health assessments has been a cause for concern. In 2019, we co-located the NELFT LAC Team with our social care team and a new IHA dashboard tracks timeliness and performance. We also set up a multi agency LAC Health sub-group chaired by the CCG tasked to improve health arrangements for LAC and Care Leavers. This sub-group reports to the Corporate Parenting Group. The CCG has also established a monthly LAC Quality Improvement Group. Performance on health assessments is improving

We recognise that health arrangements for care leavers still require improvement and are working on addressing health passports. The Health sub-group has been tasked to drive forward improvements in this area.

Most children are placed within family settings and placement stability is good and an improving picture. Placement stability - both short term and long term - has improved further in 2019/20. Short term placement stability improved with only 7% experiencing three plus placements during the year, compared to 10% in 2018/19. We are particularly pleased with the improved performance on long term placement stability improving from 66% to 73% over the last year, above target and higher than national, London and similar areas. This improvement is testament to the well regarded in-house fostering service utilising the successful Mockingbird Programme to help keep children in their placement.

Key achievements in 2019-20

The Fostering Service has increased the number of constellations from one to five during 2019/20, including one specialist Parent and Child constellation, which supports young parents who may or may not be children in care themselves, but their children are. The feedback from the Fostering Network is extremely positive and Barking and Dagenham's model is considered a national leader. There are no plans to increase the number of constellations in 2020/21 due to the impact on COVID-19, but in the latter part of 2021 a further two constellations are planned.

Larger, active and visible Children in Care Council. 'Skittlz' - our Children in Care Council - continues to help shape practice and influence decision-making, through our Member Corporate Parenting Group (MCPG) guided by the Council's 'Children in Care and Care Leaver Promises'.

A new Corporate Parenting and Permanence Service. The Fostering, Adoption and Permanence, Children in Care and Learn2Live Teams were formally restructured in 2019 into this new service which went live in April 2020. There are now four Corporate Parenting Teams responsible for children up until the age of 18 and two Leaving Care Teams responsible for Care Leavers aged 18 through to 25. This new service structure enables flexibility to transfer young people to a Leaving Care Advisor when the time is right for that young person, rather than being dictated by their age, will reduce transition points for children in care and deliver a more seamless and improved service to all of our children in care and care leavers. The service will have a clear focus on early permanence for children and improving outcomes for children in care and care leavers.

Adoption – successful and timely transfer to RAA. The assessment of adopters, family finding and post adoption support roles transferred to the Regional Adoption Agency (Adopt London East) in October 2019, but the Council still has responsibilities for approving adoption care plans and are responsible for the children up until their adoption orders are granted. These children are held within the Adoption and Permanence Team to ensure expertise is maintained for progressing adoption plans alongside ALE. (See separate ALE Annual Report).

Improved planning for children placed with parents. We have improved planning for children placed with parents, an Ofsted recommendation, through the oversight of the Permanence Taskforce set up in the summer of 2019. All children placed with parents were reviewed in 2019 and the placement with parent's assessment form has been redesigned and improved. Children placed with their parents are also reviewed at the monthly LAC Permanence Panel and we are reporting an increase in revocations. An audit of the quality of our arrangements reported that overall children were monitored well and planning had improved.

Priority focus on UASC. LBBB have not yet reached the amended target set by the Government for the amount of UASC that we should be responsible for which is now 0.08% of the population (increased from 0.07%). It is recognised that many of these young people live in 16+ semi-independent accommodation, whereas a fostering arrangement might be more suitable for some. Due to the pressure on availability of foster placements for this age group, a focus next year will be a specific recruitment campaign to recruit carers who may be specifically interested in supporting young people who are UASC. This initiative has gained further impetus after a presentation at MGPG from a foster carer and 2 care leavers who were USAC and remain in Staying Put arrangements with the carer.

Promises to Children in Care and Care Leavers – evaluation of progress and outcomes in 2019/20

Promise 1: To make sure you get the best care

Good progress is being made and the MCPG is committed to making sure children in care and care leavers get the best care. We have improved representation at MCPG from Members and wider Council Departments to ensure a whole council approach to meeting our children and young people's needs, for example, Housing and Community Solutions.

In 2019/20, we have successfully relaunched and expanded our Children in Care Council - Skittlz - into two groups to comprise a wider age range - a 6 -13 and 14 - 21-year-old group. The Leaving Care team also have a cohort of young people with whom they regularly consult. The younger group has 16 members, and the older group 14, the largest representation we have had in over five years.

As a result of increased participation, children and young people have achieved a number of positive outcomes - examples include; communication skills, participating in consultations, planning activities (including the Takeover Day) and building their confidence. Key achievements over the past year included contributing to the development of the Council's neglect strategy, working with Public Health to address poor health outcomes, MCPG takeover day, and involvement in the London Children in Care Council for the first time. The Virtual School has secured participation in the Jack Petchey Awards Scheme, with Skittlz leading on allocating the awards.

We held a successful 'takeover' of MCPG in July 2019 by Skittlz members and Care Leavers. The 'Takeover' involved 13 children and young people and 10 professionals. Successful discussions in smaller groups enabled participants to work collaboratively to decide the focus of MCPG meetings for the following year. Topics such as support for care leavers, social workers, contact and health were chosen. Issues raised during this event are now agreed priorities. Young people feed into MCPG and attend every meeting to provide specific input around the themes identified in the takeover day.

We also hold annual Children in Care and Care Leavers Awards Ceremonies to celebrate the achievements and successes of our children. An annual Skittlz Summer and Christmas party also serves to celebrate success and in 2019 both events were attended by over 40 children in care and over 20 foster carers and professionals. In October 2019, the 6th Leaving Care Awards ceremony was also held. The event was very well attended and awards covered achievements in formal qualifications, apprenticeships, employment, volunteering, participation in groups and giving back to the community.

We formally consult with our children in care and care leavers through an Annual Survey, and although response rates continue to rise, our priority is to engage and consult with a larger number of children in care and care leavers in 2020/21. Survey findings in 2020 were overall positive with 90% of children in care aged 8-17 feeling listened to (comparable with 2019 and up from 85% in 2018); 92% telling us that they are able to contact their social worker (up from 65% in 2019); and 89% said they know how to make a complaint (up from 85% in 2018 but down on 2019 at 100%). One of the most significant improvements is a reduction in the number of social workers children (aged 8-17) had – only 8% had four or more social workers compared to 26% last year.

Frequent changes of social worker is one of the most significant issues that children in care regularly raise so this improvement is positive.

A MCPG meeting in November focused on hearing from our children and young people on what they want from their social worker. The output was a post-it list which included: kind, smart, helpful, friendly, be very calm and supportive. This feedback is incorporated into senior leadership priorities and work on our practice standards.

In 2019/20, a face to face consultation was undertaken with UASC focusing on education, health and housing. Results have been presented to MCPG and shared with the Technical Skills Academy to improve the ESOL offer and support.

In 2019/20, the IRO service has continued to strive to deliver a high quality service to our children in care despite having caseloads of around 73 children, above the recommendation of 50-70 children. The IRO service has been stable in 2019/20 enabling consistency for children and young people. A high percentage of children participate before and during their care planning review meetings and IROs are using a strength based conversational approach with children to build confidence in attending and chairing their reviews. Children in Care reviews are also timely and in 2019/20 performance improved for another year running increasing to 96% being held in statutory timescales.

In 2019/20, IROs have successfully continued to drive a child friendly review process working with our partners to ensure that the review meetings are focused on and celebrate the progress and success of our children. IROs encourage the participation of children in their Reviews and in some cases, children are supported to chair their Reviews. IROs continue to increase the monitoring and tracking activities between Reviews and ensure that the recording of their monitoring is visible on children's files.

IRO contribution to permanence planning for children has improved. The IRO Manager is part of the strategic Permanence Taskforce, enabling their views to be incorporated in the progress of permanence plans for our children directly with service leads who chair tracking meetings for children in need and child protection. In addition to dispute resolutions, this is an early opportunity to highlight where any drift or delay has been identified.

During 2019/20, there was a significant fall in the number of practice alerts being raised by IROs, demonstrating improved practice - 29 informal practice alerts and 43 formal alerts were raised compared to 102 informal disputes and 207 formal disputes in the previous year. Our senior IRO presented those findings and the IRO annual report to MCPG.

The Principal Social Worker after re-establishing the voice of the child practitioner group into a 'Lived experience of the Child' consultation forum is currently leading, together with the digital team, a project to increase child participation across the child's journey into service design, using a potential web-based platform. The initial budget for a discovery phase has recently been agreed, with the team due to report soon post consultation.

The PSW also facilitates a child practitioner forum, CSW forum and other settings where the reframing of corporate parenting, use of language and experiences of children in our care and leaving our care are discussed and built upon. One such innovation was to bring Lifelong Links into the borough for young people leaving our care to reconnect with their primary attachments. This service now sits within the Specialist Intervention Service in Care and Support.

Promise 2: To look after you and treat you well

Good progress is being made against this promise. The numbers of children coming into care via police protection reduced further in 2019/20 to 9% from 20%, but this is in the context of falling numbers nationally (London has fallen from 16% to 12%, National from 11% to 10% and similar areas from 21% to 16%).

Around 70% of children in care are placed within family settings and we are increasingly creative in our approach to maintain stability and on the cusp of care. The number of children placed in residential care has decreased slightly to 9% (36 children) at end of year 2019/20 compared to 9.4% (39 children) at the end of 2018/19. We have a lower proportion of children placed in residential care than national, London and similar areas. The number and proportion of children placed more than 20 miles from home increased slightly to 22% compared to 20% in the previous year. However, 78% of children live in the borough or in surrounding boroughs enabling them to maintain connections with school, family, and friends – a positive outcome.

During 2019/20, the local authority has prioritised permanence and has introduced a

monthly Permanence Strategic Taskforce that oversees the 'journey' of the child through Child in Need and Child Protection, Family Proceedings and Adoption. The majority of children in care have achieved permanence through 'matching' and long-term foster care, family finding and adoption, a return home to live with parents or relatives, and through court orders such as Special Guardianship Orders and Child Arrangement Orders being granted.

In 2019/20, 15 children achieved permanence through adoption (the same as 2018/19), representing 7% of all children leaving care - above London, but below the national and similar areas averages. 33 children (16%) had become subject to special guardianship orders (SGOs) same as 2018/19, and higher than all comparators. These are permanent care arrangements with reduced likelihood of breakdown compared to children who remain in long term care of the local authority.

The 2019/20 Adoption annual report sets out our adoption scorecard performance, which is now improving year on year, although we know children are still waiting too long to be placed for adoption and experience delay against national targets. Our adoption improvement has been recognised by the DfE and we are no longer on the adoption task force improvement radar. This is very positive. The Permanence Taskforce continues to keep oversight of adoption and the adoption scorecard indicators. Improving adoption timelessness remains a priority area.

Placement stability has continued to improve in the last year. Short term placement stability has improved with only 7% (29 children) experiencing three plus placements during the year, compared to 40 (10%) in 2018/19. Performance is good and better than all comparators.

We are pleased with the improved performance on long term placement stability improving from 66% to 73% over the last year, above target and higher than national, London and similar areas. This improvement is testament to the Mockingbird programme playing a significant role in maintaining placement stability, which has been presented at MCPG.

The feedback from carers and children and the Fostering Network are extremely positive and our model is considered a national leader. We continue to be creative and robust in our approach to ensuring placement stability, engaging with internal and external partners to support fragile placements early to prevent placement breakdown.

In 2019/20, we have also moved the sourcing of placements into a brokerage function to ensure we have the right placements for children and young people – with a focus on maximising and improving commissioning to be more strategic.

Our new Specialist Intervention Service is also designed to support placement stability through the offer of restorative and therapeutic interventions and lasting links work.

Good improvement is also evident in social workers staying in touch and visiting children in care regularly – 97% of children in care were visited every six weeks – up by 14% on last year and 99% were seen every three months (plus 1% on last year).

Compliance with Pathway Plans remains an area for improvement falling to 87% at the end 2019/20 compared to 94% in the previous year. Learning audits in 2019/20 demonstrates improvement in the quality of pathway plans, and evidence of care leaver’s contribution and voice are stronger in Pathway Planning. Improving compliance ,consistency and the quality of pathway plans remain priority areas for the new Corporate Parenting Service.

Promise 3: To keep you healthy

Improving health outcomes has been a top priority throughout 2019/20, an Ofsted recommendation. 87% of children in care had up to date health assessments at end of year compared to 92% in 2018/19. Performance was impacted upon due to COVID-19 with a high proportion of RHAs due in March 2020 not being completed by end of the reporting year. However, 87% remains in line with all other comparators.

The timeliness of initial health assessments (IHA) remains high priority for the DCS and senior leaders in the Council, CCG and NELFT. A range of actions have taken place in 2019/20 to address performance including the strategic decision to co-locate the NELFT children in care team with our social care team. To support this collaborative working, a new IHA performance dashboard has been produced on the Council’s Liquid Logic system and data and activity is now live to ensure compliance and timescales being met.

The multi-agency LAC health sub-group chaired by the CCG has been tasked to drive improvement in health assessments and health arrangements for LAC and Care Leavers and the Zoning Meeting which tracks performance on IHAs and RHAs. This sub-group reports quarterly to the Corporate Parenting Group.

The CCG has also established a monthly LAC Quality Improvement Group covering all aspects of health assessments, including commissioned capacity and resolution of workforce risks.

The timeliness of initial health assessments improved to 26% at the end of 2019/20, and whilst an improvement is not good enough for our children and young people. We are pleased to report that the impact of actions taken are bearing fruit in 2020/21 with IHA timeliness significantly improving to 72% (end of August 2020).

As part of the health assessments, emotional issues are identified, and emotional wellbeing is monitored as part of the annual health check process. A good proportion of children in care return a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), and the results of those SDQ scores show good performance. SDQ scores reduced from 12.8 to 12.5 and remain slightly below comparators. Work is underway to set up SDQ scoring on Liquid Logic and that all children who require SDQs have them completed in advance of IHAs and RHAs so that emotional wellbeing will be considered holistically alongside physical health. This means that changes in emotional health over time will also be more clearly tracked and appropriate provisions to support emotional wellbeing will be identified as part of the health assessment process.

We have significantly strengthened the relationship between the CAMHS Service and Children’s Care and Support in 2019/20 through our monthly IJOC practice sessions led by the Operations Director and PSW.

Teaching sessions have been delivered and a CAMHS Hot Clinic is in place fortnightly where social workers can drop in and access CAMHS advice and support. This has resulted in an increase of referrals to CAMHS being progressed and dealt with in a timely way.

In addition, the CAMHS Transitions Group has been set up to look at pathways for young people transitioning from children to adults’ mental health provisions. This group looks at the strategic changes that are required to ensure seamless transition, but also has individual cases discussions to tackle blockages and unpick ‘what went wrong’ in some situations.

A dedicated CAMHS worker has been appointed to work directly with a small number of children to ensure their needs are addressed within local CAMHS services liaising with services out of borough when necessary. This worker also offers support to foster carers and is developing alternative ways to engage children and young people with support for their emotional wellbeing.

The DCS is Chair of the 3-borough child health transformation meeting providing greater opportunity for local oversight of CAMHS transformation work.

We recognise that health arrangements for care leavers requires improvement and the MCPG are working on addressing health passports. The multi-agency Children in Care and Care Leavers Health sub-group reporting into the Corporate Parenting Group has been tasked to drive forward improvements in this area. LAC nurses are providing virtual meetings with Care Leavers to provide them with their health passports. Work is being undertaken to ensure that all future passports can be provided in an electronic version and that meetings are offered to go through the information if the young people want this to take place.

Promise 4: To get the best education

Our Virtual School is strong and demonstrating good outcomes in attainment, attendance, compliance, and quality of PEPs. Over 80% of school aged children in care have an up to date Personal Education Plan (PEP) and the quality of PEPs is improving.

The majority of our children in care are in good or outstanding schools. Absence from school remains below the borough average and fixed-term exclusions are below the national average.

At KS1, our students performed better than their national LAC peers in three out of the four subjects and by a huge 10%+ in maths and science. KS2 results are strong with our children in care outperforming their national looked after peers. 60% of our students achieved the expected standard in Reading and Maths compared to 37% nationally - placing us second in the country. Performance remains above the national average at Key Stage 4, which is a pleasing result considering that 22.5% of students have an Education, Health & Care Plan compared to 2.5% of all pupils in the borough.

Following the Ofsted inspection in February 2019, an external Peer Review of our Virtual School with a focus on young care leavers with more complex needs accessing EET was undertaken. The Peer Review reported that the quality of the virtual school tracking data at all key stages is good and that the virtual school has developed some effective partnerships. This has broadened the offer and motivated and inspired young people aged 16-18 years and care leavers. This supports services such as the apprenticeship network, university taster days, residential learning experiences and UCAS support meetings. The review reported that the

virtual school team place significant focus on the social and emotional well-being of children. This promotes attachment aware practice for designated teachers and interventions with schools. Pupil premium plus (PP+) is used flexibly to allow focus on children experiencing difficulties or to fund whole school training. Schools understand the impact of trauma and how to strengthen children's resilience and feelings of safety in school.

The following areas were raised as growth opportunities – improve the governance arrangements for the virtual school. The Virtual School in response to this has set out the terms of reference for a Management Committee. This has been presented to the Corporate Parenting Board and was approved this term. In the coming term, members of this Management Committee would be recruited in line with the recommendations.

The relationship between social workers and schools needs to be improved and joint training for social workers and designated teachers organised by the virtual school would be useful. This has now been actioned and every month a joint training is organised for Social Workers and Designated Teachers which is focused on supporting children in education using the ePEP.

There is no regular risk register meeting in the virtual school by which the team comes together to review high risk cases or alert each other to escalating concerns: This recommendation has been adopted by the Virtual School and a termly risk register meeting is now part of the Virtual Schools calendar and it is a forum to discuss high risk cases.

How we act to celebrate young people at the virtual school? The Virtual School has opted to use the current Children in Care Annual Awards ceremony to sponsor education awards and jointly celebrate children alongside the Social Work team to ensure that progress in education has a more prominent focus in the annual celebration event.

Promise 5: To be successful in life

In July 2019, Cabinet agreed the enhanced Local Offer and our Assembly agreed that Care Leavers resident in the borough will be exempted from Council Tax up to the age of 25, effective from April 2020. Our enhanced Local Offer and the exemption scheme were launched by the Chief Executive at the Care Leavers' annual awards ceremony held in October 2019.

The offer is on the LBBD website, which has been revamped to ensure easy navigation of information.

The proportion of care leavers living in suitable accommodation has continued to improve to 87% in 2019/20 compared to 81% in 2018/19 and is above all comparators. We have established a Vulnerable Housing Panel (VHP) to improve housing options for our care leavers. Care Leavers ready for independent move-on accommodation are presented to the VHP to consider appropriate housing options that will meet their needs. Children's Care and Support work in conjunction with the Housing Department to identify and facilitate planned moves, including the care leavers in discussions about the options available to them.

Care leavers are supported in a range of external semi-independent provision which is subject to a Commissioned Framework, and includes shared houses rented from the private sector with bespoke support packages if required. This framework ensures an appropriate, best-value service that delivers excellent outcomes for young people and ensures consistency in the quality of accommodation provided to young people. In 2019/20, a restructure of Adults and Children's Commissioning has resulted in additional resources to quality assure both providers in both Adult's and Children's Care and Support. Young people will also be visiting provisions with commissioning colleagues as part of the drive to improving the quality assurance process. This will be rolled out in 2020/21.

We are very proud of our care leavers in further and higher education and outcomes improved during 2019/20 and our keep in touch figures are over 90%. The multi-agency EET panel, comprising of representatives from the Virtual School, Job Shop, Apprenticeships and Careers Advisors, is having a positive impact - 63% of care leavers were in education, employment or training at the end of 2019/20 compared to 54% in 2018/19 and our best performance ever - above all comparators.

Our Virtual School supports care leavers in preparation for University through group activities, mentoring opportunities, and adventure weeks in different countries. This academic year, we have 20 care leavers who are at University and 4 care leavers graduated.

We have high aspirations for our care leavers and are committed to celebrating their achievements and ambitions. In October 2019, the 6th Leaving Care Awards ceremony was held. The event was very well attended and awards covered achievements in formal

qualifications, apprenticeships, employment, volunteering, participation in groups and giving back to the community.

New Town Culture is an ongoing collaboration between arts and social care agencies, funded between 2018 and 2020 by a London Borough of Culture award from the Mayor of London. A variety of activities were run during the year for 22 foster families and 48 foster children, 18 UASC and 33 Care Leavers which centred around feelings of identity and included making a film. The activities have been well received and further events were planned for 2020-21, but COVID-19 has had a significant impact on delivery and a delay in planning events that are COVID-19 safe.

A further four young people attended the trip to Ghana in summer 2019 and a further six attended a multi-national trip in Austria, offering them a unique experience of another country.

Our plans for the next 12 months – 2020/21

- **Leading and managing the recovery and legacy and new ways of working as a result of COVID-19.** Since March 2020, virtual visiting has effectively enabled social workers and Leaving Care Advisors to regularly contact children and young people. But feedback has been that face to face visits are still the preference of many children and young people. It is essential that all statutory visits revert back to face to face, but virtual means of communication can be used in addition to increase the frequency of contact with our young people in a more relaxed and informal way. This will hopefully improve the quality of relationships as set out in the relationship based-practice approach within the Local Authority. New ways of working will also be considered for other meetings such as health assessments where it is difficult to engage young people, as a way of improving representation at LAC reviews, PEP meetings for example.
- **All Elected Members to continue to be ambitious and passionate corporate parents.**
- **Embed the new Corporate Parenting and Permanence Service**, further strengthening Corporate Parenting, permanence and outcomes for LAC and Care Leavers.
- **Refresh the Corporate Parenting Strategy** by the end of the year.
- **Consult with a larger cohort of children in care and care leavers, including those placed further away.** Virtual ways of working during COVID-19 has enabled creative options for engagement and consultation with a larger number of children and young people, including those placed a considerable distance away from the borough. This is a top priority for 2020-21.
- **Strengthening participation in Reviews.** IRO's will engage children and young people more creatively to participate and/or chair their own reviews. This includes ensuring children and young people feel they are being listened to and feeding back children's views, wishes and feelings.
- **Implement Virtual School Peer Review opportunities** and continue to ensure education outcomes improve for children in care .
- **Maintain or further improve performance on placement stability.**
- **Ongoing focus on edge of care work and rehabilitation home** in order to ensure the right children are in care. This will be strengthened through the Specialist Intervention Service.

- **A focus on unregulated 16+ placements; maintain fostering post 16 when placements can become fragile and increase foster care options for UASC.** A new fostering recruitment campaign is planned to recruit more foster carers who are willing to consider adolescents and UASC placements, so the reliance on 16+ provisions can reduce
- **Continue improvements in Care Leavers in Employment, Education and Training**, with a focus on older care leavers using cross-Council support and opportunities in challenging COVID-19 times.
- **Sign up to the Care Leavers Covenant** - engaging local businesses and ensuring a 'universal family' approach for our care leavers.
- **Continue to improve the housing offer to care leavers and ensure good performance in suitable accommodation.**
- **Improve and sustain performance on health assessments.** The foundations of improvement have already been laid for sustained improvement in performance, which has been due to a high level of collaboration between Health and the Local Authority. There are already significant signs of improvement in 2020-21.
- **Continue to improve the offer to support children and young people's emotional wellbeing.** Integrate the use of SDQs more holistically into the health assessments so emotional wellbeing is considered alongside physical health.
- **Continue to strive to improve health arrangements for care leavers.**
- **Deliver Lasting Links** with a Lifelong Links project worker working with care leavers supporting them in securing lifelong positive links to support their transitions beyond 25.
- **Listen to our Black and Asian children to understand their experiences of care** in the context of our ambition to drive forward the Black Lives Matter agenda.
- **Undertake inequalities data analysis** to help identify any inequalities including access to services and gaps in service provision; including LAC and Care Leavers.
- **Participate in the DfE Care Leavers Improvement two day visit** scheduled for November 2020.