

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6 January 2021

Title: Corporate Parenting Report	
Report of the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration	
Open Report	For Information
Wards Affected: All	Key Decision: No
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Accountable Directors: Chris Bush; Commissioning Director for Children's Care and Support; April Bald; Operational Director for Children's Care and Support	
Accountable Strategic Director: Elaine Allegretti, Strategic Director for People and Resilience	
Summary	
<p>The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) has requested an update on the key issues for Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers in the borough. The Members' Corporate Parenting Group (MCPG), chaired by the Lead Member of Social Care and Health Integration, is the key strategic group that ensures the Council and its partners are the best possible 'parents' to our Looked After Children and Care Leavers.</p> <p>The MCPG produce a detailed Corporate Parenting report annually and the latest report can be found at Appendix 1. This Annual Report has been included as the response to the OSC agenda item as it clearly provides an overview of what we are doing well, the key achievements in the last year, what are our key challenges and our plans to address those challenges in 2020/21 and beyond.</p> <p>In addition, the DfE National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers carried out a two-day virtual visit to the Local Authority on 11 and 12 November 2020. This visit included meetings with the Leader, Lead Member for Social Care and Health Integration, Acting Chief Executive, Director of Children's Services, Operations Director for Children's Care and Support and Senior Officers across the Council including partner agencies, and focus groups with some of our Care Leavers. The visit was very positive, and a summary is set out in section 4.</p>	
Recommendation(s)	
<p>The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) Note the contents of the Corporate Parenting Annual Report;(ii) Note the improvements and developments for Looked After Children and Care Leavers and our plans for the next 12 months; and	

(iii)	Note the summary feedback of the DfE two-day formal visit by the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers.
Reason(s)	
The Council is required to produce a Corporate Parenting Report annually, and to present this to elected members in their capacity as corporate parents.	

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 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 Looked After Children and Care Leavers, as any good parent would do for their children. Looking after and protecting children and young people is one of the most important jobs that Councils do and when a child, for whatever reason, cannot safely stay at home, it is up to us as the local authority to step in and give them the care, support and stability that they deserve.
- 1.2 This is not just up to the Lead Member or Director of Children’s Services – we need everyone looking out for our most vulnerable children and young people, and every Councillor has a role to play. Being a corporate parent means doing everything we can for every child in the Council’s care – and every Care Leaver – to give them the opportunities that other children get. This covers everything from keeping an eye on their progress at school, to looking after their health and wellbeing, to preparing them for life as independent adults – and supporting them when they get there.
- 1.3 We have reinvigorated and strengthened the MCPG in the last 18 months, chaired by the Lead Member for Social Care and Health Integration, and includes three other elected Members who individually champion education, health, and placement quality. The MCPG also includes representation from Community Solutions including Housing, Homes and Money, Health, Commissioning and Education. Looked After Children and Care Leavers present at each Board and once a year have a take-over where they chair the Board and set our priorities for the year ahead.
- 1.4 The Promises made to our Looked After Children 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 who we are responsible for.

2. Barking and Dagenham Context – Looked After Children and Care Leavers

- 2.1 At the end of October 2020, the number of Looked After Children in Barking and Dagenham fell to 383 compared to 402 at the end 2019/20. This corresponds to a rate of 60 per 10,000 children, lower than the England and statistical neighbour rates but higher than London. During COVID-19, the number of children coming into care has been lower compared to pre-COVID-19, for example, 95 children have come into care between April and October 2020 compared to 120 in April to October 2019.
- 2.2 We currently have 281 Care Leavers aged 18 to 25 in Barking and Dagenham of which 98 are former Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers (UASC). This compares to 245 at the end of 2019/20 and 82 former UASCs.

3. Corporate Parenting Annual Report

- 3.1 2019/20 has been another busy year with many key achievements and improved outcomes for our Looked After Children 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.
- 3.2 The work of the MCPG has also concentrated on delivering the promises we have made to our Looked After Children and Care Leavers. We are ambitious for children and young people and want them to lead happy, safe, and successful lives.
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 The report clearly shows that strong and effective senior leadership is in place with an unrelenting focus on improving outcomes for Looked After Children and Care Leavers. Most of our Looked After Children are placed within family settings and placement stability is good. Our adoption scorecard performance is improving year on year and this has been recognised by the DfE. We are no longer on the adoption task force improvement radar but improving adoption timelessness continues to be a priority area. The Virtual School is strong and demonstrating good outcomes in attainment, attendance, compliance, and quality of PEPs. The majority of Looked After Children are in good or outstanding schools. Our Virtual School supports Care Leavers and in this academic year, we have 20 Care Leavers who are at University and four Care Leavers who have graduated.
- 3.5 The Council's commitment to Care Leavers has been significantly strengthened and currently, 92% of our Care Leavers are living in suitable accommodation – above all comparators. 65% of Care Leavers are in education, employment, and training, up by 3% on the end of year figure and above national, London and statistical neighbours.
- 3.6 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 formally consult with Looked After Children and Care Leavers through an annual survey, and response rates continue to rise. However, we recognise the volume of those participating needs to increase and are exploring young-people friendly digital options. We celebrate our children's achievements at an annual awards ceremony. Due to COVID-19 this year, workers are visiting young people to deliver their trophies and certificates and taking pictures which will be collated to mark the occasion.
- 3.7 Improving health arrangements and outcomes for Looked After Children and Care Leavers have been top priorities throughout 2019/20, an Ofsted recommendation. Since Ofsted, 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.

- 3.8 Looked After Children's and Care Leavers' mental health is a priority particularly during COVID-19 where isolation is increased. A good proportion return a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), and these are now tracked via improved reporting functions so we can ensure a holistic approach to our Care Leavers' health needs. A CAMHS Hot clinic has supported an improved mental health offer. 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.
- 3.9 We recognise that health arrangements for Care Leavers still require improvement and are working on addressing health passports. The multi-agency Looked After Children and Care Leavers Health Sub-Group reporting into the Corporate Parenting Group has been tasked to drive forward improvements in this area. All Care Leavers are now encouraged to download the NHS App, by the provider specialist nurses, which has many functions and is regularly updated. The hard-copy version of the health passport is no longer used. Work is ongoing at the LAC Health Subgroup with an audit proposed for January 2021 to assess variation and compliance, led by the provider and Local Authority.
- 3.10 Whilst we have much to be proud of with the improvements we have made and the level of commitment and passion that has been shown to improving the lived experience of Looked After Children and Care Leavers, we still have a way to go. As with all parents, we should be relentless in our efforts to make sure we are doing everything within our gift to help them become resilient, be happy and achieve their full potential.
- 3.11 The Corporate Parenting Annual Report is attached as Appendix 1.

4. Two-day formal visit by National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers

- 4.1 Mark Riddell, the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers carried out our Improvement Visit (virtual) on 11 and 12 November 2020. As part of this visit, he held various meetings and focused groups with the Leader, the Acting Chief Executive, Lead Member, Elected Members, Director of Children's Services, Operations Director, Strategic Leads, Operational Managers, Front Line Managers, Young Person's Advisors and Care Leavers.
- 4.2 In summary, the visit was very positive and feedback from Mark Riddell states that he was "very impressed by the leadership and management approach that was ambitious, aspirational and I got a real sense of passion and commitment to have a better offer for care leavers across the whole service area". The visit and feedback confirmed the strengthened leadership in this area and the significant progress we have made in our approach to Corporate Parenting, our local offer and the extended duties that apply to Care Leavers up to 25 years. Our Corporate Parenting Board has been strengthened and a recommendation is to extend the membership of this Board to DWP and Probation.
- 4.3 The visit confirmed that our Leaving Care model is operationally good but that the model could be stronger with specialist workers based in the Leaving Care team i.e. a dedicated Housing Officer resource in the team, an Emotional Wellbeing/Mental Health Practitioner and an EET officer. Caseloads were at an acceptable level,

although our Leaving Care Personal Advisors covered many areas, tasks and complex processes that sometimes made them feel out of their depth.

- 4.4 Our Housing Offer was considered as very positive especially given the challenges with supply and demand in the borough. Our leisure offer and Council Tax Exemption for care leavers were also viewed as very good. We have Care Leaver apprenticeships already in our Local Offer, but a recommendation was made for us to set a ringfenced amount as a target (possibly 10).
- 4.5 A key recommendation was to review and strengthen our 'Whole Council' offer by organising an event with each partner agency so that they can set out their Local Offer and "for the test to be applied 'is this good enough for my child' and with a particular focus on: A health offer to Care Leavers from 18yrs to 25yrs; and a Probation offer to Care Leavers entering and leaving custody up to 25yrs". Several other recommendations have been made and these will be incorporated into our improvement plan enabling us to reach our ambition of being 'the best corporate parents' we can be.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 One key element of our work in corporate parenting and in planning for permanence is ensuring that children and young people are involved, both in their own plans and by feeding into broader service development through groups such as Skittlz and the Members Corporate Parenting Group. The Corporate Parenting Annual report outlines activity in this area over the last year and the new strategy will seek to further improve opportunities for children and young people to meaningfully contribute to planning.

6. Financial Implications

Implications completed by: Katherine Heffernan, Head of Service Finance

- 6.1 There are no financial implications directly arising because of this report which is largely for noting. However, it may be helpful for the Committee to understand the financial issues of the services.
- 6.2 The cost of the Corporate Parenting and Permanence Service is £27.5m in 2020/21 (P7 forecast). This includes the cost of social work and staffing (£4m including the fostering service) and placements, care, and accommodation for Looked After Children (£19.9m) and Care Leavers (£3.5m). Around £8.1m of the LAC placement cost is spent on foster placements, £4.3m on support for Adoption and £6.3m on Residential care. The balance is for specialist provision (secure, family and baby, UASC).
- 6.3 There is a variance against budget of £5.415m and this is the main overspend in Children's Care and Support. Around £2.9m of the overspend is linked to Residential Care placements for a relatively small number of children with very high needs – including some (c15) with complex disabilities. This year, the number of children requiring residential care has increased (from 26 to 31 at November) and the costs of such placements has grown increasingly expensive. Some of this increase is linked at least in part to the impact of the Covid epidemic and lockdown.

There is also an overspend of £1.6m on support for Care Leavers. As noted above the number of young people supported has been growing.

7. Legal Implications

Implications completed by Lindsey Marks, Deputy Head of Law

7.1 All Members have individual and collective responsibility as the Corporate Parents for Barking and Dagenham's Looked After Children.

7.2 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Public Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report: None

List of appendices:

Appendix 1: Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2019/20