

London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2021/22

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Foreword

As Lead Member for Social Care and Health Integration and Chair of the Members Corporate Parenting Group, I am proud to introduce the 2021/22 annual report of Barking and Dagenham's Members Corporate Parenting Group (MCPG).

Since the last Corporate Parenting report was produced, we have moved out of COVID-19 restrictions and into recovery but are now being hit by the cost of living crisis. Barking and Dagenham is a community hit hard by the pandemic, with many structural inequalities exacerbated and we are still learning the impact of this. It is a borough with a population that is growing rapidly with the highest rates of poverty in London (and in some areas the country). We have very high levels of churn and mobility within vulnerable communities; likely to be some of the hardest hit with the cost of living crisis and looming recession.

Our improvement journey, knocked a bit off track by COVID and its aftermath, is one of whole system's improvement, on every area of practice and in a unique local context – we are working to be good in every area – partnerships, prevention, social work practice, recruitment, retention and caring for our staff and children and families, improving the lived experience and outcomes of the most vulnerable children and young people.

The work of the MCPG continues to focus 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 are pivotal to the work of the MCPG and that is why the MCPG changed its meeting structure last year. The business of the MCPG continues but this is once a quarter. Every meeting is now about the children and young people and hearing their experiences, voices and improvements required as well as spending time with them and taking part in fun activities together.

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 2022/23 and beyond. The report presents activity

and performance data from 2021/22 and sets out the plans for the next 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 strong and effective MCPG and as committed Corporate Parents, we are relentless in our ambition to achieve this.

Councillor Maureen Worby

Chair of the Corporate Parenting Group

1. Introduction and Background

Introduction

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 strong leadership, challenge, and accountability at every level – now young people led, improving members and leaders understanding of the experiences of being in care and a care leaver

Elected members are playing a leading role in championing the Council's aspiration for our children in care and care leavers with the Lead Member as Chair and three other elected Members. Our MCPG has good representation from Children's Social Care, Health, the Virtual School, Community Solutions including Housing, Homes and Money, Health, Commissioning, Education, as well as representatives from the Children in Care Council (Skittlz), and a Foster Carer representative.

The MCPG was very pleased with the positive feedback from the DfE follow up visit in March 2022 by Mark Riddell, the National Implementation Adviser for

Care Leavers. This confirmed the leadership and management commitment to remain ambitious and aspirational for care leavers and that our enhanced local is one of the best with a clear enhanced offer for the most complex care leavers.

The MCPG also kept its promise to getting to know our children in care and care leavers much more. All meetings are led by children and young people, for example, an outing to ten-pin bowling with children aged under 16 and a session with pizzas focusing on mental health with our care leavers. Both were fun, interactive sessions which has been regarded as extremely valuable for all.

We have finalised the internship position and will appoint a care leaver into this role, with a view to enhancing our participation work with care leavers. We also hope to secure funding for a participation lead in Care and Support this quarter in order to further develop this work as we recognise the current offer is not ambitious enough and more capacity is required.

Our priorities and plans for 2022/23 are based on the analysis of progress in this annual report, Ofsted recommendations, the DfE Care Leavers improvement visit and from what we understand about the lived experiences of children in care and care leavers.

The Promises made to our children in care and care leavers 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 has become one of the fastest-changing communities in Britain. The population was estimated to be 218,900 at 2021 Census: an increase of 18% since 2011 Census - the 3rd highest growth in England and Wales. GLA projections estimate the population to increase to 264,500 people by 2030.

The age of the community is changing with the highest birth rate in London, and a large proportion of young people. Barking and Dagenham has the highest proportion of children aged under 16 in England and Wales at 26.1%. The borough becomes more diverse each year with 66% of the resident population identifying as coming from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds compared to 19% in 2001. 41.3% of Barking and Dagenham residents were born outside of the UK – 10.4 percentage points higher than 2011 Census.

Barking and Dagenham had the highest overall deprivation score in London and 17th highest in England (IMD 2019; MHCLG). The Census data 2021 shows that the borough has the fourth highest average household size at 2.96 and over 60% (3 in 5) households were deprived – the highest proportion in England and Wales.

People in the borough die earlier, have poorer health and lower levels of education and skills than across London whilst too many residents are in low paid work and struggle to find suitable homes they can afford. Unemployment remains high. Barking and Dagenham has highest percentage (12.8%) of lone parent households with dependent children in England and Wales.

An increasing number of families have and are continuing to experience the effects and impact of the pandemic and now the cost of living crisis and as a result, are displaying an increasingly higher level of need.

Our child population

Barking and Dagenham is a young borough, with around 63,509 children and young people under the age of 18 - 30% of the total population, the highest proportion in the England and Wales.

76% are from ethnic minorities and the proportion of children and young people who speak English as an additional language is more than twice the national average. This level of diversity presents its own challenges when working with families and young people, where a better understanding of cultural subtleties becomes crucial.

25% of children under 16 in the borough are living in relative low-income families, significantly above the UK average of 19%. The proportion of children known to be eligible for free school meals in 2011/22 is 25.5% compared to 22.5% across England

Domestic abuse is a significant issue in Barking and Dagenham and impacts on all service areas - 16.5 domestic abuse offences per 1,000 people – a slight increase and still the highest in London. It accounts for 37% of violence with injury offences in the borough and is a presenting factor for at least 20% of children's social care contacts annually and around a third of social care assessments for children have domestic abuse as a presenting factor in the family.

Despite the challenging context, the Council and elected members are ambitious and aspirational in their commitment to improving the lives and outcomes of our residents and vulnerable children, young people, and families.

Our children in care and care leavers

At the end of 2021/22, the number of children in care increased to 413 compared to 391 in the previous year. This end-of-year position corresponds to a rate of 64 per 10,000 children, which remains higher than the London rates but lower than national and statistical rates. During 2021/22, the number of new children coming into care increased from 193 to 203, an increase of 5% and 181 children left care – a decrease on the 204 in the previous year.

Overall, this is positive when set against the growth in population and demand. The age profile of children in care is older than the local authority average and national average with 69% of our children in care aged 10-17 and we have a higher proportion of 16-17-year-olds in care – 26% compared to 9% in the population of the borough. White children are over-represented in Barking and Dagenham's children in care, comprising 51% of children in care at the end of 2021/22 (33% in the local under 18 population). Conversely, Black, and Asian children are under-represented, making up 17% and 12% of children in care, but 30% and 25% of the under 18 population. We have a higher proportion of males in care, with 226 (53%) males and 187 (47%) females at the end of 2021/22. Of the 413 children in care at the end of 2021/22:

- 293 (71%) lived with foster and kinship carers - up 2% on the previous year.
- 51 (12%) were in residential care. This is a decrease on the on the 2020/21 figure of 54 (14%) and the proportion is now below London and statistical neighbour averages.
- 18 children in care (4%) were placed with parents comparable with 2020/21.
- 45 (11%) were in semi-independent placements - comparable with 2020/21.
- 6 (2%) were in adoptive placements with prospective adopters at year end, lower than the previous year of 12 children (3%).
- 39% placed in the borough – no change on last year.

During 2021/22, 16 children were adopted (2 more than 2020/21), representing 9% of all children leaving care - above London and similar areas, but below the national average of 10%. . 17 children (9%) had become subject to special guardianship orders (SGOs), lower than the 2020/21 figure of 20 children (10%). We are in line with the London average, but below the national and statistical neighbour's average.

At the end of 2021/22, 312 young people 18 plus were care leavers, of which 110 were former UASC. This is a slight increase on the previous year of 310 care leavers (109 former UASC). The number of UASC aged under 18 decreased to 29 (0.04%) at the end of 2021/22 compared to 33 (0.05%) in 2020/21 and numbers remained below threshold set at 0.08% (52 children).

2. Key achievements in 2021/22

- A journey of continuous improvement and transforming services in the context of considerable challenges.
- Council leaders and Members continue to respond supportively, with considerable investment made into Children's Social Care since 2021
- Young people led Member Corporate Parenting Board going from strength to strength with honest conversations with children, young people, foster carers, and partners resulting in better understanding of lived experiences, what needs to be different and agreed actions for improvement.
- Social workers and leaders continue to be passionate about doing their best for vulnerable children and families.
- Positive staff morale, social workers report feeling well supported and cared for by their managers and leaders.
- Children in care and care leavers are supported by social workers who know them well.
- Specialist Intervention Service continues to develop interventions that reflect children, young people and community needs to help keep children in their families or return home.
- For those children in care, a strong in-house fostering service supported by the Mockingbird programme continues to keep placements stable and responding to the variety of needs of our children.
- Our work with care leavers underpinned by "no expiry date" ethos for our care and support offered, with strengthening relationships, good rates of keeping in touch, and celebration of their achievements.
- Ambitious, aspirational, and passionate Council investment to Care Leavers, an improved enhanced Local Offer, and improved outcomes
- No expiry date for young people robust, positive, and showing local ambition to improve outcome for vulnerable young people.
- Effective Virtual School - achieving good outcomes for children in care and care leavers
- Above average proportion of care leavers in education, employment and training for three years running.
- High proportion of care leavers living in suitable accommodation impact of improved housing offer and joint partnership working.

Promise 1: To make sure you get the best care

The MCPG is committed to making sure children in care and care leavers get the best care. Skittlz - our Children in Care Council – has an active but small membership and continues to help shape practice and influence decision-making through our Member's Corporate Parenting Group (MCPG) guided by the Council's *'Children in Care and Care Leaver Promises.'*

Skittlz comprises of two groups: 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 21 members, and the older group 14.

Young people led corporate parenting board, improving members and leaders understanding of the lived experience of being in care and a care leaver; the MCPG has been revamped purposefully to ensure greater participation of children in care and care leavers. Each meeting of the MCPG is now activity and participation based led by young people with the support of participation workers. Priorities are set by young people and focus on care leaver housing, enhanced local offer, mental health, and emotional wellbeing, and lived experience. The MCPG led a social event at a local bowling alley where relationships with young people were developed in an informal fun setting, viewed positively for all. The more formal aspects of MCPG such as annual Virtual School and IRO reports and performance data are circulated separately.

In September 2021, both the older and younger groups participated in a MCPG meeting ran in the style of a 'takeover day'. The children and young people set the agenda and led the meeting. Mental health, Enhanced Local Offer, and activities for younger children in care were key issues. Following the success of this meeting and how well everyone worked together, managers and councillors requested that every MCPG meeting throughout the year be run in this style. Therefore, the format of meetings changed, and young people attended for the full meeting and have pre-prepared questions to raise. This has enabled young people to work collaboratively with decision makers and has led to a **You Said, We Did** plan with progress against each action reported over the course of the year.

In 2021, on the return of face to face sessions, the older Skittlz group meet twice per month, increasing membership and providing young people with a more engaging environment to discuss issues and concerns as well as participating in consultations. In 2021/22 the older Skittlz group participated in a range of consultations, these included; reviewing and providing feedback about digital health passports for looked after children and young people, meeting a commissioner and volunteering to sit on a panel to agree the retendering of a contract for the Vineries, shared ideas for digital mental health resource which is being created locally for young people- the group were asked for specific content for care experienced children and young people and the group have worked with New Town Culture to suggest additional activities for their programme. A big focus has been mental health and the Enhanced Local Offer for care leavers, both discussed during group sessions and during MCPG meetings.

In 2021/22, Skittlz members have been awarded the Jack Petchey each term by project youth workers. This was set up by the virtual School and all monies so far have been used towards trips for each of the groups. Young people have been awarded for their commitment to the Skittlz project, their personal growth, developing new skills and affecting positive change locally.

One Skittlz member created social media content for use on Council Instagram account. This content addresses specific issues that care experienced children and young people will relate to, such as transition to independent living, staying motivated and dealing with emotions and poor mental health.

In 2021, Skittlz and the Barking and Dagenham Youth Forum were invited to work in partnership with the East End Women's Museum, aimed at gathering young people's views on the museum content. Other opportunities afforded to Skittlz members includes benefits workshop to educate them about their entitlements and how to avoid financial instability, delivered by the Homes and Money Hub. Five young people also participated in a project called Bikewise educating about bike repair and maintenance providing a free bike, lock, and helmet.

During the summer 2021, work was undertaken with young people individually and in groups to explore the impact of the Black Lives Matter. Young people engaged well resulting in a programme of work being developed for foster carers, social workers and IROs to address issues of diversity, particularly where

there are issues of cross cultural, racial, and religious placements. This is ongoing in 2022/23.

In 2022/22, the IRO service continued to strive to deliver a quality service to children in care. A high percentage – 89% - of children participate before and during their care planning review meetings. Children in care reviews are also timely with 94% being held in statutory timescales in 2021/22. We have a tracking system for all reviews. IRO contribution to permanence planning for children is improving but we have lots of work to do in this area.

During 2021/22, 105 practice alerts were raised by IROs on behalf of young people. This is a slight increase on the 100 practice alerts raised in 2020/21. The key themes arising from practice alerts were drift and delay (recommendations not being acted on); reports not being prepared for statutory reviews; and visits taking place outside of timescale. Our senior IRO will present those findings and the 2021/22 IRO annual report to MCPG later this year.

Promise 2: To look after you and treat you well

Promise 2: To look after you and treat you well

We are ambitious corporate parents to all children in care and care leavers up to the age of 25 with no expiry date. In 2021, the Corporate Parenting Service reorganised and aligned three children in care teams with three care leaver teams. This has enabled the Leaving Care Advisors (LCA) to form relationships and get to know children better in preparation for allocation and joint work is undertaken with the social workers before allocation post 18 to an identified LCA. This provides flexibility for allocation so that social workers can retain responsibility for a period of time post 18 if this is in the best interests of the young person, whilst receiving support from the LCA.

The number of LCAs increased from 12 to 15 in response to the rising number of young people post 18 within the service, allowing LCAs to spend time with young people rather than increasing caseloads which impact on relationships and quality time.

The reorganisation has integrated the ethos of Corporate Parenting and a shared ownership for all children in care and care leavers, rather than the responsibility of individual teams.

Integrated working has improved with a return to dedicated office space for the service, where children and young people can drop in to see workers post COVID.

A staff Away Day was also facilitated by New Town Culture (Arts project) to facilitate sessions on how to work more creatively with young people. This developed new connections within the service after a high level of individual/home working during the COVID and was an opportunity to develop new ideas for life story work, diversity work, using creative methods to communicate with young people in a different way.

In 2021/22, the majority children in care - 82% - were visited every six weeks and almost all (97%) were seen every three months.

Care leavers are also visited regularly and keep in touch figures are high at 99% at 99% for 17-18 year olds and 97% for 19-21 year olds. We are pleased with this performance given that COVID was still very much a feature of the reporting period of 2021-22.

Pathway planning has been an area for improvement and the good news is that performance for care leavers improved to 86% at end of 2021/22, an increase of 9% on previous year. Pathway planning for children in care aged 16-17 also improved to 86% but both need to further improve as all should have a pathway plan updated. Improving compliance, consistency and the quality of pathway plans remain priority areas for the Corporate Parenting Service and MCPG. The development and roll out of the revised pathway plan should drive forward improvements as it is shorter and succinct co-produced with young people.

Stability and permanence for children and young people is a top priority and the Ofsted focused visit on permanence in May 2022 has clearly set out a set of recommendations in permanence. An improvement plan is in place and progressing well. A permanence arrangement framework is in place with a revised permanence operational protocol and a permanence tracker for all children in care and a new permanence scorecard implemented in 2022/23.

Improving picture of tracking and progressing children's permanence plans. Almost all children in care have a permanence plan recorded and this an improving picture. Improved early permanence for new-borns through work of pre-birth team and a residential oversight meeting ensures circumstances for children in these settings are better understood with improvement on driving forward their plans for leaving residential care where appropriate.

In 2021/22, most of our children in care (over 70%) continue to be placed within family settings and are living in stable homes. Most children continue to be placed less than 20 miles from their home enabling them to maintain connections with school, family, and friends – a positive outcome. Of those 22% that are placed more than 20 miles, we know that the majority are living in surrounding areas overall, for example Essex, Kent, and other London boroughs.

Nationally, sufficiency and suitability of placements is under pressure and impacting on stability and permanence. We have a well-regarded in-house fostering service striving to actively recruit new foster carers, but this remains very challenging. In 2021/22, 13 new foster carers were approved, and ongoing recruitment remains a priority. Commissioning is also exploring all options for increasing external placement providers, but again this is a national challenge. Work is underway to provide a detailed refreshed Children in Care and Care Leaver Sufficiency Plan due to the challenging national context.

Barking and Dagenham has embraced the Mockingbird Programme to support children and carers using an extended family support model. This is a key achievement stabilising fragile placements due to the extensive support Mockingbird offers. At the end of March 2022, there were five constellations all supporting approximately ten families each with the aim of all foster families being part of a constellation in the longer term.

These initiatives are increasingly important as although long term placement stability is strong and improving to 70% at end of 2021/22 (above all comparators), short term placement stability – the proportion of children in care having three plus placements increased to 13% (comparators 10-11%). This is a complex picture linked to the availability of foster carers as well as challenging adolescents, children with complex needs who are more at risk of placement breakdown.

We have also increased investment in good edge-of-care services to ensure, where possible, children can remain at home with their families. The Specialist Intervention service offers a range of existing edge of care services such as Family Group Conferencing, Restorative Intervention, Family Support, Therapy, Family Contact, Lasting Links, Group work and the Volunteer Offer.

Since 2020, we have seen an increase in the demand for residential placements, due to the level and complexity of need of children coming into care. In 2021/22, 51 (12%) were in residential care and this is a slight decrease on the 2020/21 figure of 54 (14%) but still higher than 2019/20 at 34 (9%). Our proportion remains below London and statistical neighbour averages.

The number of children coming into care via police protection slightly decreased in 2021/22 to 19% (38 children) but we are now above London, similar areas, and England. We track and report numbers of children entering care on police protection weekly and audit all children subject to police protection. Findings and recommendations are reported to senior leadership, the Children's Improvement Board and MCPG.

All unaccompanied asylum-seeking children enter the Corporate Parenting service to ensure expertise is utilised and we continue to provide a timely and effective service placing them in independent accommodation or foster care according to their assessed needs. The number and proportion of UASC placed in semi-independent accommodation was 45 (11%) comparable with 2020/21 but lower than 2019/20 at 62 (15%) at end of 2019/20. This is still high compared to London, similar areas, and national averages.

Our vulnerable children in care at risk of abuse, exploitation and going missing are reviewed regularly at MASE (Missing and Sexual Exploitation) and CEG (Criminal exploitation Group), both of which are informed by the monthly pre MASE/CEG operational group. We continue to monitor missing children through the effective monthly multi-agency missing children operational panel (MCOP) which reports directly into the strategic groups. This Panel has been further strengthened and now also considers our top reporting 16+ accommodation providers to ensure compliance with the Philomena Protocol on a quarterly basis.

An area for improvement previously set out by Ofsted was to ensure that for

children in care who go missing or who are vulnerable to exploitation, return home interviews are routinely completed. Missing coordinators are persistent and consistent in offering quality RHIs to children in care, improving understanding of risks and reasons for the missing episode. The take up and timeliness of the return home interviews has subsequently improved with a richer set of data.

A daily missing children report is circulated to the DCS and other safeguarding partners and includes children placed in LBBB by other authorities who have been reported missing to police. We also monitor the completion of the return home interviews to ensure we have met with children and or their parents and carers to check on welfare but also identify the reasons why they are going missing as well as potential indicators of exploitation. The themes and issues identified in these reports also inform the MASE and CEG. An area for continued focus is to ensure that the data captured in the interviews with children and their parents/carers is fully considered in the ongoing work and safety planning for the child.

Barking and Dagenham continues to be part of Adopt London East (ALE) - the Regional Adoption Agency also covering Havering, Tower Hamlets, and Newham. During 2021/22, 16 children achieved permanence through adoption compared to 14 in 2020/21. This represented 9% of all children leaving care (compared to 7% in the previous year) - above London and similar areas but below the national average. The proportion of children leaving care on a SGO decreased from 20 (10%) in 2020/21 to 17 (9%) in 2021/22. We are in line with the London average, but below the national and similar areas.

The latest published DfE adoption scorecard covering 2019-22 demonstrates continued improvement. The average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family was 492 days – a decrease on the 503 days for 2018- 2021. However, this remains above the ambitious DfE threshold of 426 days, but we are closing the gap. The average time between court authority for adoption and a match with their adoptive family was 218 days – no change on the 218 days reported for 2018-2021. This is above the DfE threshold of 121 but again we are closing the gap.

Performance on adoption and timeliness is gradually improving, but we are adopting fewer children overall. The East London Court is granting less

Placement Orders, especially for older children, who we have successfully placed in the past, impacting on adoption.

A further issue is the lack of clarity that has occurred within care proceedings about the use of Early Permanence placements and whether or not we need court permission to place in such arrangements. This has now been clarified that we do not need permission to make such arrangements as the prospective adopters are in the role of foster carers until the granting of a placement order and are aware of the risks of a child returning to birth family. More early permanence placements would have a positive impact on scorecard performance. All local authorities in ALE have experienced the above issues and this has been raised with the lead Judge in East London Court.

We have worked hard to improve oversight and quality of placement with parents' arrangements, and this is ongoing. At end of March 2021/22, there were 18 children placed with parents compared to 14 in 2020/21. The number of children privately fostered is low in the borough at seven children but those that are, are assessed in a timely way, visited regularly, and are living in suitable care arrangements.

Promise 3: To keep you healthy

Strategic oversight and leadership to improve health outcomes for children in care improving but still much to do.

The multi-agency LAC health sub-group chaired by the CCG and the health focused Zoning Meeting reports into the MCPG on performance health for children in care and care leavers.

Performance with Initial Health Assessments (IHA) in 2021/22 was 43% and remains a challenge for a variety of reasons – delays in providing Health completed paperwork within 5 days of coming into care, plus Health having enough clinic slots to meet demand on a monthly basis when the number of children entering care peaks above average. Infection with COVID has also impacted with many appointments for assessments being cancelled at late

notice or on the day. These issues continue to be a challenge and are a priority for 2022/23 with high visibility in the LAC Health Sub-Group.

Performance with Review Health Assessments (RHA) in 2021/22 was 92%, which was better than the previous year as dental checks were significantly impacted upon by COVID. Performance on dental checks has started to recover from COVID-19 increasing to 60% at end of 2021/22. Eye checks for all children in care has remained stable at an average of 66% - up on end of year by 2%. However, this requires improvement as a much higher proportion of children in care should have an up to date eye check.

The majority of children in care for one year or more had an up to date medical at 84% in 2021/22.

As part of health assessments, emotional issues are identified, and emotional wellbeing is monitored as part of the annual health check process. A very high proportion (87%) 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 11.6 to 10.0 (the lower the better) and remain below London, similar areas, and England.

In 2020/21, we set up SDQ scoring on Liquid Logic for all children in care aged four or over. At the end of the year, a high proportion had an SDQ recorded in the last 12 months with a lower SDQ score of 9.7. 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.

Hot Clinics provided by CAMHS ensure children in care and foster carers receive the appropriate help and support, and during the pandemic, this was critical in preventing placement breakdowns.

A dedicated CAMHS looked after children social worker works 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 through training sessions as well as

consultations on an individual basis. In January 2022 CAMHS practitioners were invited to join Skittlz at MCPG meeting to open a conversation about how best to support looked after children. A number of gaps were identified, and these are now tracked at the LAC health subgroup and progress fed back to Skittlz members on a bi-monthly basis.

In November 2021, the Healthy Smiles Pilot (NHSEI) was launched in North Central and East London to increase children in care and care leavers' access to dental treatment in recognition of the impact of Covid on accessing dentists. The initiative did assist some young people in accessing dental treatment, who might otherwise have not had a check-up or treatment.

One issue in particular that impacts on both IHAs and RHAs is the lack of suitable interpreters for specific languages for some UASC. Whilst the majority of languages can be accommodated for appointments, there have been a number of occasions when we cannot locate a certain language or dialect which impacts on the timeliness of the appointment taking place.

In order to provide a better health service to UASC across the North East London footprint, Newham Looked after Children health team has developed a bid to be considered by Barts Charity, to provide services across this area for new UASC, but no decision has yet been made re the outcome of the final stage of the bid. It is proposed to have a trauma informed integrated pathway adapted to local requirements. This includes longer assessments with CAMHS specialist clinicians and a health improvement practitioner, delivery of workshops for UASC around their common concerns, and multidisciplinary meetings to follow-up and review needs. It also includes universal infectious diseases screening and intensive mental health support.

The LAC Health Sub Group meets on a monthly basis and addresses areas of concerning performance and Ofsted improvement plans relating to health. It has a wide representation from the ICB, NELFT, CAMHS and the Local Authority, and requests attendance of specific professionals when addressing particular topics e.g., sexual health.

Improving health for care leavers update

Progress has been made locally in North East London area regarding the offer of free prescriptions for Care Leavers and has been agreed. LBBD will be involved in the pilot in 22-23 as to how this will be rolled out in practice to young people.

The senior LAC nurse has been working with Skittlz to devise the best offer for Care Leavers for accessing their health information (previously Health Passport) post 18. The NHS App contains all relevant information, and a LAC nurse will meet with young people around the age of 18 to show them how to use the App and to answer any questions. However, some young people would like a hard copy of their information and this work is ongoing with Skittlz as to how all young people can access the information now and in the future in a format that works for them. The NELFT LAC team are in the early stages of designing a QR code to support care leavers in accessing health information.

We are very proud of the appointment of our Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Worker for Care Leavers as this is a coveted post by many Leaving Care Services across the country. Having secured ongoing funding from the CCG to maintain this post means that it can be fully integrated into the Corporate Parenting Service with no concerns about funding ceasing for the near future. We are already seeing an impact for individual young people who are attending sessions and we will be evaluating the themes emerging from this work in 2023/24 to inform the development of this work and how other professionals can contribute more meaningfully to the emotional wellbeing of children and young people at an earlier stage.

In recognition of the positive impact of physical activity/sport on emotional wellbeing, one LCA has led on a boxing initiative for Care Leavers. She linked up with a local gym and set up a male and a female boxing group that offered 10 sessions per group. The feedback was very positive from young people who enjoyed the activity, but also enjoyed meeting other young people after a time of isolation during Covid. One young man who was experiencing mental health issues and very isolated has progressed so well, that he will be undertaking his first formal fight in the near future.

Promise 4: To get the best education

Effective Virtual School - supporting other professionals

The Aspire Virtual School (AVS) continues to be strong, providing an effective service. It has recently grown, with an identified KS4-KS5 transition lead, an interim Assistant Headteacher to lead on the extended role of the Virtual School and an interim Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities coordinator (SENDco)

Building on good practice, the AVS continues to hold virtual Designated Teacher (DT) network meetings, enabling out of borough colleagues to attend and hear first-hand the Virtual School's offer of support. As a result, contact with out of borough colleagues continues to increase considerably. The AVS staff cannot be at every PEP meeting so it is important that our DTs are the best that they can be to support our students in school, so it is vital that they attend this training. We have also purchased licences from a company called AC Education <https://www.ac-education.co.uk/>, who provide excellent online courses for both school and social care professionals.

We run training for our foster carers. This year we are focussing on emotion coaching and the foster carer's role in the PEP meeting. We are hoping that we can go back to 'live' training this year, rather than 'Teams' as we like our training to be as interactive as possible.

One of our core functions is to ensure our students are placed in the most appropriate schools, attending every day, and making a good level of progress. We do this by having a new to care advisory teacher, who contacts the social worker straight away to make sure that the first Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting happens within timescales. This allows us to quickly identify where a student needs a new school place and support social care colleagues with the application. Occasionally, our students are not in school for a period of time, due to a variety of circumstances and then we commission tuition for them as a short term stop gap. Where a student has an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP), (around 25% of our students), we support the EHC team to place the young person in school as the AVS is unable to do this.

The AVS continues to attend fortnightly 'high needs' meetings with the inclusion, EHC, Social care, Health, Educational Psychology teams and the Commissioning Director Education to ensure our most vulnerable students are supported. This meeting ensures that students are placed in the most appropriate provision and help is available to prevent education placement breakdown.

Aspirational Virtual School – supporting our young people

We commission tuition for students not in education, for example those who had a placement move. This is delivered either face to face or virtually, depending on the preference of the student. This is usually a short-term option whilst a school place is being applied for. We use a number of different agencies who provide qualified teachers quickly when we need them. This sometimes continues for a short period to support the student's transition to a new school.

The AVS commissioned Third Space Learning, an online maths intervention, to work with all of our year 6 students to support their preparation for KS2 SATs. This intervention was received very well by teaching staff and students alike. One student commented:

'I found it very good and useful. I like the tutor he's very kind. It helps me a lot. It makes my maths easier. I can understand more. It's helps as gives me more help and makes work in class easier. He's a kind person and really helps me a lot so I feel better about maths and more comfortable with maths'

We also continue to build in additional careers interviews for year 10 and 11, where necessary, to support KS5 choices. We do this for both students placed in and out of borough.

The AVS Awards have been created to inspire our young people, with the winners receiving a trophy or medal, a gift card, and a certificate. A new award has been created, in memory of Deb Wiltshire, a colleague from the EHC who sadly died of COVID in January 2021. The Deb Wiltshire Award is awarded to 'a student with SEND who has accessed their education and made full use of the opportunities offered to them.' We are hoping to be part of the CIC awards this year to give them out personally.

The Virtual School continues to work successfully with The Transformed You mentoring service – who provide a bespoke for Looked after Children. In

addition, we have used PP+ funding to commission mentoring services out of borough, bespoke support with behaviour management for schools, counselling for young people in crisis (where CAMHs referrals were taking a while), play therapy, art therapy and top up tuition, where there is an identified need.

The **Aspire Higher** Programme continues to be developed alongside our **University Alumni**. The Aspire Higher Programme is organised in collaboration with local universities and the Careers Team in the council for an identified group of young people from Year 4 to Year 13. We now have 43 students identified on the Aspire Higher Programme. Different events have been organised for the different year groups to ensure that they are inspired to focus on higher education and subsequently supported to achieve this goal. We now have a former LBBB care leaver running these two projects on our behalf.

We ran our first residential trip for 12 students to the Trewern Outdoor Activities Centre in Wales. This trip aimed to build independence and social skills. Students engaged in various activities including caving, gorge walking, swimming in the open river, mountain climbing and archery. The Virtual School ensured that the trip was accessible to our children with additional needs, and a communicator was arranged for the child with a hearing impairment. Four members of the Virtual School accompanied the young people on the trip.

Students gave us the following feedback:

"I enjoyed making new friends, and I was very proud of myself for caving as I was scared of heights but did the challenges."

This weekend was good. I made new friends, tried new things, and went on the water slide"

"This weekend I had an amazing time we went gorge walking, the food was great, we went underneath the waterfalls. I had the most amazing time I could have had"

Strong Virtual School - achieving good outcomes

The Aspire Virtual School continues to demonstrate robust outcomes in terms of attainment, attendance, exclusions, PEP quality and timeliness. Most children in

care make good progress and attainment for our children in care remains above national children in care average. The most recent data shows that we remain below the national average for all for unauthorised and overall absence and for fixed term exclusions. Most of our children in care are in good or outstanding schools, and where they aren't the AVS monitors their progress very closely.

There is no validated data at KS1 or KS2 for 2021. At KS4 in 2021, 30.8% of children in care achieved 9-4 pass in English and maths compared to the national average of 28.8%. KS4 Average Progress 8 score is in the A quartile and also above national average.

The AVS has worked hard with social care colleagues, to improve the Personal Education Plan (PEP) completion rate and in 21/22, 89% of children in care had an up-to-date PEP compared to 86% in 20/21. The quality of PEPs has also improved and during the recent OFSTED focused assurance visit we received positive feedback from the HMI who commented on the 'love and care' shown in the PEPs sampled.

The AVS **Management Committee** provides an extra layer of challenge and support to the Virtual School. It is comprised of an Independent Chair, 7 members and a clerk to record minutes. We have termly meetings, and it is now in its 3rd academic year. Members of the committee decide the agenda and what they want to focus on.

Promise 5: To be successful in life

Ambitious, aspirational, and passionate Council investment to Care Leavers, an improved enhanced Local Offer, and improved outcomes

Our ambition, investment and progress were confirmed by the follow up DfE visit in March 2022 by Mark Riddell, the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers. The visit and feedback endorsed our rapid improvement and progress to have a better offer for care leavers across the whole service area. It also confirmed the strengthened leadership in this area and the significant progress we have made in our approach to Corporate Parenting, our enhanced local offer and the extended duties that apply to care leavers up to 25 years.

As corporate parents we are proud with the feedback from the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers stating that our Enhanced Local Offer *"is really good and is one of the best I have seen in the country as it has a clear enhanced offer for your most complex care leavers. The approach of 'no expiry date' is a clear indication that you will always be there for care leavers post 25yrs which is an exceptional approach"*.

Following on from the DfE lead recommendations, the Leaving Care Service now has a dedicated Housing Officer and an Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Worker – two key posts to support young people to be successful into their adulthood. The recruitment of the Emotional Wellbeing Worker is a key achievement offering individual support, group work and consultation with social workers and Leaving Care Advisors on emotional health and wellbeing.

New Town Culture has been a key partner over the year in providing children in care and care leavers (including UASC) with creative opportunities to develop their confidence and interests. They have provided a range of groups and activities for these young people, but they have also been able to join other groups if they wish to e.g., LGBTQ+ group. The range of clubs includes Sound Club, Drama Club, Dance Club, Gardening Club, Banner Making and four groups throughout the year that include foster carers and their foster and birth children, to enable the whole fostering family to participate in activities.

Our housing offer to care leavers is good given the challenges with supply and demand in the borough. Suitable accommodation for care leavers, therefore, has improved further despite the pressure of the pandemic and the supply challenges faced in the borough. At the end of 2021/22, 85% of care leavers were living in suitable accommodation, down by 3% on 2020/21. Performance however remains above the London, similar areas, and England averages of 81% and 83% respectively.

We have further strengthened housing offer to care leavers ensuring a range of options of good quality are available. This is an evolving offer as more options are developed for example access to Reside properties, refurbishments of properties via Homes for Humanity. Whilst the majority of care leavers would like to have their own social housing flat, this is not always possible, and work continues to explain these limitations and to promote high quality alternatives.

The Vulnerable Housing Panel continues to improve housing options for care leavers with dedicated staff to support young people paying their rent and preventing evictions.

Care leavers continue to be supported in a range of semi-independent provision secured through commissioned framework, and includes shared houses rented from the private sector with bespoke support packages if required. This framework ensures an appropriate service that delivers excellent outcomes for young people and ensures consistency in the quality of accommodation.

2020 and 2021 has been an exceptionally difficult year for young people due to the pandemic. So as corporate parents, we were pleased that for the third consecutive year running, over 60% of care leavers were in education, employment, or training, above London, similar areas, and England averages by 8% and 12% respectively. Our 2021/22 performance was 62% - an increase of 2% on our 2020/21 performance of 60%. This is testament to senior leaders and managers across the Council and partnership working hard to support and improve young people's education, employment, and training outcomes through internships, in-house apprenticeships, and traineeships.

The Aspire Virtual School is committed to supporting the achievement and progress of our care leavers. We have recently created a dedicated role to support all 16+ with an EHCP who is supported by our new interim SENDco. In addition to this, a new post is now in place which is the Key Stage 4 to Key Stage 5 transition lead, focused on ensuring that our care leavers do not become NEET. She is working with the Deputy Headteacher on the early identification of care leavers struggling in education and exploring options such as apprenticeships, employment, and internships. She has started working closely with our Social Care colleagues and attending meetings like NEET Panel and the Care Transition Panel.

This year 8 students progressed to University, which is 50% increase from 4 young people who progressed to University in 2021.

Aspire Virtual School is keen to increase the number of care leavers who progress to university. To address this, the Aspire Virtual School is using "an early inspiration strategy." An Aspire Higher and Alumni Project Lead has been appointed who is a previous care leaver. She is working on creating an alumni

network of care leavers currently or previously at university, to inspire younger looked after children with a focus on 16+. The alumni network would serve as both an informal mentoring, support group and social gathering for care leavers previously or currently at university.

We have extended the Independent Visitors (IV) offer to include care leavers and currently three Members have been mentoring three of our young people, offering them inspiration, guidance, and support. Our under 18 IV programme continues to expand and fully meet rising demand, with 19 current long term matches compared to 14 a year ago. Of those three children in care that are currently on the waiting list for an IV, none have been on the waiting list for more than 3 months and we have not gone above three at any point in the past year. Becoming an IV forms part of the Council's formal volunteering offer for staff, strengthening our corporate parenting approach. Independent visiting for care leavers has continued for one care leaver in particular with a long standing supportive relationship having developed.

We have high aspirations for our care leavers, and they are involved in their services and their achievements are celebrated. We ensure that the Local Offer to care leavers is available to all eligible young people in various formats. A text messaging service to keep young people updated on events, jobs and opportunities will be launched in 2022-23.

We usually celebrate our children's achievements at an annual awards ceremony but last year, due to the pandemic, workers visited young people to deliver trophies, certificates and took pictures to mark the occasion. Post COVID-19, we are planning a face to face celebration event with care leavers in January 2023 and in the summer for children in care.

Our headline plans for the next 12 months – 2022/23

Continue to implement and monitor progress against the DfE Care Leavers Improvement plan.

All Elected Members to continue to be ambitious and passionate corporate parents.

Elected Members to continue to hold all partners to account and champion the needs of our care leavers, unlocking the full potential that the council, voluntary services, and businesses offer to improve the lives of our carer leavers. This includes signing up to the Care Leavers Covenant and the whole Council celebrating National Care Leavers week.

Refresh the Corporate Parenting Strategy by the end of the year.

Consult and ensure greater participation with a larger cohort of children in care and care leavers, including those placed further away. This is a top priority for the year ahead .

Further improve the offer and take-up of return home interviews to children in care who go missing, so that information is gathered and used to minimise risk and to inform safety planning (Ofsted recommendation).

Improve the quality and impact of services to support care leavers and to help them to prepare for adulthood, with a specific focus on their emotional and physical health and well-being (Ofsted recommendation).

Further strengthen participation in children in care reviews.

Maintain or further improve performance on placement stability. Working with wider London partners to address sufficiency of placements.

Ongoing focus on edge of care work and rehabilitation home to ensure the right children are in care.

A continued focus on unregulated 16+ placements; maintain fostering post 16 when placements can become fragile and increase foster care options for UASC.

Management oversight and improved supervision to consistently drive case direction – supporting more timely permanence arrangement being achieved for children.

Implement permanence improvement plan and address all Ofsted Permanence Focused Visit recommendations

Maintain positive outcomes for Care Leavers in Employment, Education and Training.

Continue to ensure the housing offer to care leavers and the support they need to manage independent living.

Extend the use of mentors/independent visitors for care leavers who have no or limited contact with family.

Improve Initial Health Assessment timeliness and quality.

Improved focus on children coming into care via Police protection.

Improve quality of life story work.

Improve the quality of pathway plans for care leavers.