

# LONDON BOROUGH OF CROYDON

<b>REPORT:</b>	<b>CABINET</b>	
<b>DATE OF DECISION</b>	<b>25<sup>th</sup> October 2023</b>	
<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>Croydon Corporate Parenting &amp; Care Leavers Strategy</b>	
<b>CORPORATE DIRECTOR</b>	<b>DEBBIE JONES, CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION</b>	
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	<b>JANE SCOTT, TRANSFORMATION LEAD, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE</b> <a href="mailto:Jane.Scott@croydon.gov.uk">Jane.Scott@croydon.gov.uk</a>	
<b>LEAD MEMBER:</b>	<b>CLLR MARIA GATLAND</b> <b>CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE</b>	
<b>KEY DECISION?</b>	<b>REF:</b>	<b>REASON:</b> Decision significantly impacts on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more Wards.
<b>CONTAINS EXEMPT INFORMATION?</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>Public</b>
<b>WARDS AFFECTED:</b>	<b>All</b>	

## 1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1** Croydon's Corporate Parenting Strategy & Care Leavers Strategy have been informed by children looked after and care experienced young people, colleagues across directorates and our partners. The strategy complies with the duty to measure local authorities and relevant partners plans and delivery against the corporate parenting principles as defined in Section 10 of the Children Act 2004.
- 1.2** This report sets out the challenges and responses to improving the experiences and outcomes of children and young people in and leaving care. The report will highlight how improvements, co-produced with children and young people will be achieved alongside corporate financial cost avoidance and efficiencies.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

For the reasons set out in the report and its appendix, the Executive Mayor in Cabinet is recommended:

- 2.1 To approve Croydon's Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- 2.2 To approve Croydon's Care Leavers Strategy.
  
- 2.3 To note that the effectiveness of the new arrangements and measures of success will be reported through the Corporate Parenting Board and existing directorate performance management frameworks to ensure decisive actions are taken to address any issues.

### **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 To adopt a strategic and shared approach to responding to the range of needs and support of children and young people in and leaving care.
- 3.2 To provide stable and loving homes for our children and young people as a foundation to their wellbeing, goals, and aspirations.

### **4. BACKGROUND AND DETAILS**

- 4.1 The government's response to the Care Review, completed in May 22, is set out in the document, Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation and Consultation presented to Parliament in February 2023. The response highlights six key mission statements to address the improvement of experiences for children looked after and care experienced young people. The mission statements are underpinned by the commitment to ensure that all children in care have stable, loving homes, close to their family and friends.
- 4.2 As corporate parents, it is our responsibility to be the supportive parent in times when birth, adoptive parents or carers are unable to fulfil this role, therefore we describe this as co-parenting. For those young people with their own children, we need to become co-grandparents. This responsibility is not only with social workers and professionals who work directly with children and young people, but it is a 'whole council and partnership approach', council staff, elected Members, and partners. We want everyone to ask themselves: 'What can I do in my role to help children and young people in and leaving care?'
- 4.3 Croydon Council is committing to a robust three-year corporate parenting strategy. The strategy has been consulted upon widely with the corporate parenting members, council officers, partners, children, and young people in care and who have left care. We have listened carefully to the approach required to make this strategy a dynamic process that will support the building of relationships, shared purpose, and goals.
- 4.4 The corporate parenting board has a new make up of members including a young person as co-chair and ambassadors to champion each of the four priority areas. Young people will co-produce, advise and challenge us on our delivery and progress. The four priority strategic areas provide the overarching framework to drive improvement and assess progress in delivering our great ambitions for our children looked after and care leavers.

- 4.5** The priority areas for this strategy have been identified through feedback from our children and young people, from our self-evaluation, partners, Ofsted and the Department for Education. They include Priority one, **Housing and Homes**. As corporate parents we want our children to have the best start in life and to experience a supportive and positive transition into interdependence. This includes good preparation for living independently, choice of area, quality of housing to create a new home. As co-parents we need to have a flexible approach when young people make mistakes and need support and guidance
- 4.6** Priority two, **Education, Employment, Training**. We want to ensure children and young people can learn, develop, attend, engage, attain, and achieve at every stage of their learning journey from their earliest years to school, to further and higher education, for work experience, training, apprenticeships, employment, and further education.
- 4.7** Priority three, **Permanence, Stability**. When children cannot live with their parents, we will secure the best plan to meet their needs in their timescales. Wherever possible children and young people will experience their home and care in the borough of Croydon. When this is not possible it will be important to ensure that every effort is made to maintain and support links with family, significant others, and community.
- 4.8** Priority four, **Health and Adult Transitions**. Our children will be safeguarded and protected, they will experience improved health and wellbeing and positive transitions into adulthood. They will enjoy and thrive in their communities of choice.

## **Consultation with children and young people in and leaving care.**

- 4.9** Children and young people have been central to our consideration of the Croydon corporate parenting approach and the development of the strategic priorities. A series of focus groups and informal activities were arranged, and children and young people were asked to talk about what Corporate Parenting meant to them and what they want from the whole council and partners to enable them to flourish and achieve.
- 4.10** Children and young people in and leaving care told us: -
- They want commitment.** They want to feel that they are seen and heard and that they feel cared for by their corporate parents.
- They want togetherness.** They want the relationships they have with their family, significant relationships, their foster carers, social workers, and personal advisors to be respected and nurtured with reference to the importance of continuity of these relationships when a young person turns 18 years old. To invest and develop their life stories and histories as they grow to help them to develop their identity and sense of belonging.
- Listen to the voices of those that work closely with us.** They want corporate parents to listen and respond to the voices of those that work and care for children and young people. They want to see and understand tangible plans and actions to deliver improvements in how they are cared for particularly in relation to housing.
- 4.11** *'I need support, people around me and a comfortable home, where I can live for as long as I need. I don't want others deciding when I should move home again.'* Care Experienced Young Person. August 2023.

## **Corporate Parenting Principles.**

- 4.12** The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced the seven principles of corporate parenting for local authorities. Whilst not requiring this to be a duty of partners, it is incumbent upon local authorities to engage with key partners to deliver the most holistic, robust care and services to children and young people in their care and who have left care up to the age of 25 years. The application of corporate parenting principles to improving the experiences and outcomes for children and young people in and leaving care provides a framework to measure challenges and improvements, identifying mitigating activity where required.
- 4.13** The seven corporate parenting principles focus on how corporate parents and partners act in the best interests of children and young people with a focus on their physical, mental health and wellbeing. They identify the need to encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings and evidence how as corporate parents we take their views into account. There is a requirement to help children and young people gain access to and make best use of services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
- 4.14** Corporate parents need to promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for children and young people. Children and young people in and leaving care need to feel safe and experience stable home lives, relationships and education, work and to be prepared for adulthood and independent living.
- 4.15** The corporate parenting principles are not about applying a formulaic approach to how services are delivered in relation to looked-after children and care leavers. Rather they describe the behaviours and attitudes expected of councils when they are acting as any good parent would do by supporting, encouraging, and guiding their children to lead healthy, rounded and fulfilled lives. The principles intend to frame an approach that good local authorities and partners need to demonstrate to ensure high ambitions are set and achieved for the children in their care and care leavers.
- 4.16** The application of the principles must remain focussed on the individual needs, vulnerabilities, or disadvantages of looked after children and care leavers. This will assist in securing a response that is equitable in the broadness and recognition of specific needs. Transitional planning and pathways will create opportunities for our care leavers to experience assessments plans and resources that reflect they're maturation and need rather than responding to an indicative age of maturity. The priority given to diversity and equality of opportunity will underpin decision making, to ensure that children and young people are not placed at significant disadvantage when compared with the support a non-looked after child or care experienced young person would expect from their family.

## **Challenges and Opportunities**

- 4.17** Parents want their children to have the best start in life and to reach their full potential. Croydon is an ambitious London Borough for all its children and young people and, like any good parent,

has high aspirations for the children in our care and for our care experienced young people as they move into adulthood.

- 4.18** Croydon is operating within exceptional financial constraint. We need to develop further our offer to enable children to be looked after by families in the community without the need to be in our care, wherever possible. When children cannot live with their family, we need more local foster carers who can access holistic support to care through challenging times, creating greater permanence and stability. The local offer to care experienced young people to date has not been consistently good or reflected the level and range of need. We are galvanising the willingness and combined resources of the council and partners. The corporate parenting strategy will address inequality and raise the standard of care and opportunity for our children and young people.
- 4.19** The four strategic areas for improvement over the next three years will be supported, challenged, and reviewed through the work of the Corporate Parenting Board. A corporate parenting transformation programme has commenced which will invest resource to drive the activities to achieve the desired outcomes.
- 4.20** Through improving the care, homes and services to children and young people in and leaving care we have identified cost saving efficiencies and cost avoidance. Focussing on improving our permanence planning and supporting the stability of children's care and homes reduces time spent in care and responding to crisis. Local fostering recruitment and retention of foster carers provides greater opportunities to match children's needs with carers. Avoiding the increased cost of procuring independent fostering agency homes for our children, which may not always be in Croydon. We will develop a range of homes that reflect the differing needs of our young people as they leave our care and provide access to support that helps them to sustain and enjoy their homes and independence. Improving our overall sufficiency planning will reduce unit costs of placements.
- 4.21** Developing our approach to supporting children and young people to engage and achieve in education, training and employment, alongside improved access to health, wellbeing, adult services, and the accessibility to suitable homes for our care leavers all contribute to increased stability and increased financial independence. These combined elements support both a significant improvement in our whole council and partnership approach to corporate parenting with a positive impact upon cost efficiencies and cost avoidance.

## **Corporate Parenting Ethos**

- 4.22** A strong ethos of corporate parenting is required to drive a clear vision and responsibility towards the children we look after and our care leavers, is a priority for everyone. We recognise that looked-after children have the same needs – to be loved, cared for and feel safe - as other children.
- 4.23** There are unique challenges that looked-after children and care leavers face. The majority of our children become looked-after due to abuse or neglect and will have poorer educational and health outcomes than their peers. Croydon's strong corporate parenting ethos recognises that the care system is not just about keeping children safe, but also to promote recovery.

## Protected Characteristic

- 4.24** The full council of the 12<sup>th</sup> of July reviewed the motion considering Care Leavers as a protected characteristic as outlined in Josh McAlister's care review, which has not been adopted at this point by the governments Stable Homes, implementation programme. It was agreed unanimously to resolve to support the motion that the Corporate Parenting Board will progress the exploration of the status directly with young people, through the implementation of a task and finish group, under the auspices of our Corporate Parenting Board, to fully understand their wishes and views on how Croydon should respond to the issue of Care Leavers as a protected status. This was discussed at the Corporate Parenting Board meeting of 20<sup>th</sup> September, the Task & Finish Group will be led by the council's Participation team with membership of children in care, care experienced young people, elected members from the Corporate Parenting Board and other relevant partners.

## Corporate Parenting Ambition.

- 4.25** As a Corporate Parent, Croydon council and our partners want to be ambitious for our children and young people in and leaving care. We will provide a range of support, we will listen and hear the voices of our children and young people, which sometimes may mean we pause and evaluate our approach to ensure that they can be the best they can be, happy and proud.
- 4.26** *'To be helped to succeed in education, to travel beyond Croydon and see the world, to have experiences with our friends, family and the professionals that work with us. These are important and make us happy'.*

**Feedback from children and young people. January 2023.**

## Governance.

- 4.27** Effectiveness of the new arrangements and report measures of success through our Corporate Parenting Board and existing directorate performance management frameworks to ensure decisive actions are taken to address any issues.

## 5 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1** Council services could continue to work without a corporate parenting strategy, and instead a cross council and partnership approach would need to be designed to maintain oversight of delivery and impact against the seven corporate parenting principles as outlined in The Children Act 2004 & The Children and Social Work Act 2017. This would not be in the interests of children looked after, care experienced young people, as working without a defined strategy is not considered good corporate parenting practice and is therefore not recommended.

## **6 CONSULTATION**

- 6.1** We have consulted widely with Council Directorates, partners, children, and young people in and leaving care. Received feedback from Ofsted and the Department of Education.
- 6.2** Our children and young people's participation strategy is in development. We are recruiting young people to be part of our Corporate Parenting Board and to work with us on the corporate parenting action plan. We have specific focus groups and activities in progress to provide different opportunities for young people to engage and share their views, wishes and feelings.

## **7 CONTRIBUTION TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES**

- 7.1** The proposals contained within this report contribute to the following outcome in the Mayors Business Plan for 2022- 2026.
- Children and young people in Croydon have the chance to thrive, learn and fulfil their potential.

## **8 IMPLICATIONS**

### **8.1 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1.1** The Corporate Parenting Strategy aligns and supports a transformation programme in progress to improve outcomes for children and young people whilst addressing cost efficiencies and cost avoidance. Through improving our sufficiency, we will increase choice and stability for children and young people whilst driving down unit costs. A focus on increased opportunity for young people who are care experienced to enjoy stable homes and greater economic security creates less financial reliance on the local authority to provide emergency provision and interim payments.
- 8.1.2** Further work and detailed analysis are required to assess the key deliverables and full impact of the improvement work across the three-year corporate parenting strategy. Ensuring scrutiny and oversight of how cost efficiencies and avoidance are realised.  
Maiyani Henry-Hercules (Head of Children's Social Care Finance. 21/9/2023).

### **8.2 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.2.1** The Council must produce, and work to, a Corporate Parenting Strategy in order to meet the requirements of, and its obligations pursuant, to the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The Corporate Parenting Strategy 23-25 satisfies this requirement.

- 8.2.2 Local authorities have a duty under Children Act 1989, as amended by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the Children and Social Work Act 2017, to support young people and promote their welfare when they have ceased to look after them. The plan for each young person is set out in their pathway plan where their goals and aspirations are clearly outlined.
- 8.2.3 The new duties in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 extended support to care leavers to age 25. This has increased the number of young people entitled to support.
- 8.2.4 The Local Authority is obliged to ensure Care Leavers can access key services, including suitable housing, emotional wellbeing support and support to access education, training, and employment.
- 8.2.5 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 (CWSA) strengthened the role of local authorities as corporate parents and applies to all local authorities as set out in section 1(3) of the Act. The CWSA also extended the provision of Personal Adviser support to care leavers up to the age of 25, whether they are in education or training, which the care leaver can choose to take up. It is therefore important that joint housing protocols cover the support available from a local authority area to care leavers up to the age of 25.
- 8.2.6 All local authorities have a legal obligation to support young people making a transition from care to independence. Local authorities are required under section 2 of the CWSA to publish a local offer, which sets out the services and the support available for care leavers. The local offer should provide information about the Care Leavers' statutory entitlements as well as any discretionary support available. It should set out how care leavers are supported to access suitable accommodation, including the support available from housing services. Joint housing protocols should be aligned with the local offer and can help to ensure that the commitments to support care leavers to access and sustain accommodation are met.

Approved by Doutimi Aseh, Head of Social Care & Education Law on behalf of the Director of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer. (13/09/2023)

### **8.3 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.3.1 The Council has a statutory duty, when exercising its functions, to comply with the provisions set out in the Sec 149 Equality Act 2010. The Council must, in the performance of its functions, therefore, have due regard to:  
eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act.  
advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;  
  
foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 8.3.2 An updated Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken, and there are no specific disadvantages associated with introduction of the programme.
- 8.3.3 The ethos of the programme is focused on revising the delivery of services to better meet the needs of children and young people who come into the care of Croydon and those young people



who have experienced care, increasing effectiveness and efficiency. To address the various workstreams, engagement has taken place with protected groups and will continue to, in order to improve and meet assigned deliverables.

8.3.4 Approved by: Naseer Ahmad on behalf of Denise McCausland, the Equalities Programme Manager. Date: 21/09/2023

## **8.4 HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS**

8.4.1 There are no direct Human Resources implications arising from this report itself. However, our policies, procedures and practices encourage the ethos that we are One Council, and that everyone has a responsibility to help children and young people in and leaving care.

Approved by: Debbie Calliste, Head of HR for Children, Young People and Education on behalf of the Chief People Officer of Human Resources.

## **9 APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 – Corporate Parenting Strategy 23-25

Appendix 2 – Care Leavers strategy 23-25

Appendix 3 – Equality Impact Assessment.

## **10 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Stable Homes; Built on Love – [\[ARCHIVED CONTENT\] Final Report - The Independent Review of Children's Social Care \(nationalarchives.gov.uk\)](#)

## **11 URGENCY**

N/A