

*Croydon Care Experienced
Young People Strategy.
23-25.*



Forward



Debbie Jones, Corporate Director, Children, Young People and Education

I am delighted to introduce our Croydon Council Care Leaver Strategy which aligns with our new Whole Council and Partnership Corporate Parenting Strategy. In Croydon, we have widely consulted and galvanised relationships across the Directorates in the Council and with our Partners to deliver an ambitious and focussed programme of work. Our Care Leavers have told us what they need us to improve, and we have responded with a renewed approach to working together through our new Corporate Parenting Board, including young people as Co-Chair and Ambassadors to co-produce, challenge and create a Local Offer which meets the diversity of need. We will ensure all our Care Leavers receive the best support and care to access the resources they need and to develop the resilience to manage a successful transition into adulthood.



Councillor Maria Gatland, Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People.

As lead member for children and young people and a corporate parent, I am proud that Croydon is developing a whole council and partnership approach, informed, and co-produced with our Care Leavers. We are ambitious for our young people and are committed to listening to what they need from us to develop and achieve stability, happiness, and enjoyment in their transition to adulthood. We recognise that young people mature at different rates and particularly for our Care Leavers this is more important to recognise given the impact of their early experiences. We will design services and pathways to include a flexible and supportive approach. Colleagues across the council and partners are excited and committed to bringing the combined skills, resources, and capacity to improving the lived experience and life choices of our young people.

Introduction

Welcome to the Croydon Council Care Leaver Strategy. This strategy relates to Care Experienced Young People, preparing to leave care, 16-18 years who have left care and continue to be entitled to access services up to the age of 25 years. This strategy aligns with the Croydon Corporate Parenting Strategy with an emphasis on a whole Council and Partnership Approach to supporting and enabling young people to manage a successful transition into interdependence. As Co-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. For those young people with their own children, we need to become 'Co-corporate grandparents'. We are committed to helping our young people to realise their goals and potential. We will develop opportunities within the Croydon area and reach out to other councils in the UK where our young people may choose to reside and ensure that they are able to access stable quality homes, education, employment and training and good access to mental and physical health services.

This Strategy outlines our challenges as a Council, what young people tell us they need and what we are going to do to address the need through co-production with our young Ambassadors, colleagues, and partners. We recognise that this is a three-year strategy and will ensure that through joint endeavour and ambition we will evaluate the impact of the improvements required and delivered to inform the learning into each year. Changes in legislation and local/out of borough needs will be assessed and incorporated into a refreshed version of the strategy as required.

Overview of Strategy

This Care Experienced Young People Strategy is informed by our own self-assessment, feedback from children and young people about the services and approach they want to support their needs and to realise their ambitions: -

- **They want Commitment:**
For our children looked after and care experienced young people to feel that they are seen that they are heard, and that they are cared for by their corporate parents.
- **They want Togetherness:**
For relationships between children, and their social workers, Personal Advisors and foster carers, to be respected and nurtured, and for it to be understood that these relationships are as important when a young person turns 18 years old. To recognise the importance of children's family relationships and life stories.

Listen to voices of those that work closely with us:

For the voices of those that work closest with our children and young people to be heard and taken account of, and for all parts of the council to work together to deliver improvements in services to them, especially in respect of housing.

We have had feedback from our partners and colleagues and external scrutiny from Ofsted and the Department of Education on areas for focussed improvement. As a council we are operating within exceptional financial constraints and need to be creative and work harder at developing our partnership arrangements to ensure that we remain efficient and build capacity to meet need. This Strategy will align with our Corporate Parenting Strategic priorities and our new Board will have oversight, drive improvements and tackle barriers to success through focussed priority groups with young Ambassadors actively supporting, advising, and challenging. The strategic developments will continue to inform and refresh our Local Offer to Care Experienced Young People.

Co-Corporate Parents and Grandparents.

In Croydon we are clear that our Care Experienced Young People require our understanding and support in preparing them for leaving care, support during the transition and to be there for them to celebrate the successes and to help when things don't always go right. We expect of ourselves as a whole council with our partners what we expect from good parents.

We understand that being ready to leave home is a process not driven by age but based on each young person's level of emotional and mental maturity and wellbeing as well as specific needs such as a learning or physical disability. Transitions are not always sequential, and we need to work with young people to allow for changes in their pathway plan to reflect the contingency plans which are needed at different times. Young people who have had a care experience may not always be able to access support from their families which is why our Corporate Parenting Strategy emphasises the need for us to co-parent into adulthood as required by a young person. Respecting their choices, supporting them to achieve stability and happiness, fulfilling education, training and work experiences and enjoyment in being part of a diverse and supportive community. Becoming active residents and contributing to their neighbourhoods and environments.

In Croydon we are committed to creating the right conditions, services, and approach to achieving support that is meaningful and has a positive impact for all of our Care Experienced Young People. We aim to achieve this through our Corporate Parenting Strategy, driving ambitions and aspirations collaboratively with young people.

We will achieve this through: -

- Strong leadership, commitment to co-parenting with your family and connected carers, driving improvements through robust performance management and a focus on what works best for you.
- We will monitor and develop our equalities improvements against our Equalities Impact Assessment.
- We will build on our engagement and involvement of children, and care experienced young people, in developing and implementing this strategy.
- We will promote an inclusive and effective partnership working across Croydon Council with support from identified elected members to each priority theme.

Our priority focus areas for the next three years based on the assessment need, including feedback from young people are as follows: -

- Creating **diverse and quality homes** for Care Experienced young people. Providing a range of support to develop life skills, promote wellbeing and support the integration of young people into communities. Driving a sense of belonging and stability for young people
- Developing a range of **educational, training and employment opportunities** that young people tell us they want. Design programmes to try out different workplace

environments and become more prepared and informed in education and training choices.

- Provide **stability and permanence** through the preparation and ongoing support provided. Promoting relationships and connections with communities and through education, training, and work experiences. Creating a sense of belonging that provides support to celebrate the good times and help through the difficult periods.
- Developing **our health offer** to Care Experienced Young People, to promote good physical, emotional and mental health through the transition into adulthood and developing skills in advocating for universal services. Creating a robust **Adult Transitions pathway** that reflects the needs of Care Experienced Young People and creates choice and a range of support to help them live the life they desire.

Who are Care Leavers?

A Care Leaver is someone who has been cared for by the Local Authority in a range of different homes.

The following young people, who are statutorily entitled to support, are part of this group:

- **Eligible** – children aged 16-17 who are still in care, and who have been in care for 13 weeks or more from the age of 14 and have been in care at some point when they were between the ages of 16 and 17.
- **Relevant** – children aged between 16 and 17 who have left care. This category of Care Leaver also includes children who are detained in institutions such as prisons or hospitals. • **Former Relevant** – young people who are between the ages of 18 and 21 and who were previously eligible and/or relevant, and who are entitled to ongoing support to enable their successful transition to independence.
- **Qualifying** – A young person who has been a CLA for at least 24 hours, post his/her 16th birthday. Young people covered by the fact that they were being privately fostered or subject to a special guardianship order. A young person who has had several planned short term breaks no longer than 4 weeks, and after each one they returned to their parents/or someone with parental responsibility. This will particularly apply to disabled young people who have regular periods of short-term breaks. Under the 2010 regulations this group is deemed to be qualifying
- Young people between the ages of 21 and 25 and who were previously eligible and/or relevant, who are in education training or employment and who wish to receive an ongoing service.
- Young people aged 21-25 who are current or returning care leavers requesting a service under the Children & Social Work Act 2017 guidelines.

Practice Framework

Our practice framework is Systemic practice, under which different relationship-based approaches sit, strengthening, restorative and motivational. We train and support our practitioners and managers to practice within this framework. We believe that this evidence-based approach enables practitioners to understand that young people and families are in contextual relationships that shape their identity. We employ clinical staff to provide support and consultation to staff and carers to help them to develop their understanding of young people's needs, their position and how to best help them particularly during the transitional period of leaving care.

How we deliver support and services to Care Experienced Young People.

Personal Advisers

All care leavers are assigned a Personal Adviser when they turn 17.5 years old and can continue to receive support up until they are 25 years old. The Personal Advisor reviews the needs of the young person with them and creates a pathway plan (PWP) to identify the key goals that they wish to focus on and how they will get there. The plan specifies who is involved to support the young person and how they wish that support or services to be delivered.

Voice of Care Experienced Young People

Care leavers themselves are involved in co-producing the Care Leavers' Offer primarily through the Children in Care Council. We are developing the participation approach to engage a greater range of voices and needs to inform service improvement for all young people. This will be further promoted by the development of our ambassador model to influence and promote change throughout the council and with partners.

Voice of Care Experienced Young People

In Croydon we have extended the Independent Reviewing Officer, (IRO) role to incorporate the first year of leaving care from 18-19 years for those young people who wish to have continued support and oversight from their IRO.

Independent Visitors.

This scheme matches a supporting adult to befriend, advise and assist a young person who may have little or no positive contact with members of their own family.

Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum

Is part of an overall participation strategy to engage and incorporate the diverse voices and views of children in care and care experienced young people. Involvement in the Corporate Parenting Board oversight and developments and a range of activities to co-produce and drive improvement initiatives are undertaken alongside creating a space for shared understanding, belonging, and making friends. A range of events and workshops are delivered every week and attendance supported at national events.

Esther Outreach

Is and Aftercare Service, providing a listening ear, advice, and advocacy to Care Experienced Young People. Esther Outreach is a voluntarily run department of a local Croydon Church that provides practical support, advice, and advocacy to 'Children Looked After and Care Leavers' working in conjunction with Croydon Council within a friendly, safe environment where they are equipped with the right tools to develop their independence skills.

Staying Put Policy

Our Staying Put Policy promotes young people to be able to remain living with their foster family. Where both the young person and carer would like the arrangement to continue. There is a good take up of this offer in Croydon and we have a detailed process to support both the young person and carer.

Joint Housing and Children's Social Care Protocol, 2023.

The Joint Housing and Children's Social Care Protocol outlines how Croydon Council and partners will view Care Experienced Young People, (CEYP), as in priority need for housing and homes whilst joint working arrangements will promote new ways to support young people who struggle to sustain their homes and tenancies. A new robust Housing Panel is being established to review the needs of all legacy situations where CEYP are in temporary homes and not able to apply for full benefit entitlements or move to more stable arrangements. A new housing quota will support transitions into homes that are equipped with key items and support for the young person will be specified.

The House Project 2023.

The House Project Programme brings young people together and provides a range of opportunities and experiences to build relationships and have mates, prepare for and manage their first home and have a pathway in to education, employment or training. The programme is what young people 'do' after they have successfully secured their place on their Local House Project and is underpinned by the [ORCHIDS framework](#). We are working with the House Project to establish our first cohort of young people to engage with this project in Croydon.

Virtual School and College

We will continue to focus on improving educational outcomes and EET rates for Children in care and care experienced young people. Our aim is to ensure all 16-year-olds have a suitable and appropriate education or employment/training option.

A Corporate Parenting, Council Wide, approach will promote mental health and wellbeing as a core foundation to support children and young people in accessing education. This will include listening and responding to the voices of children and young people in relation to what supports them to succeed and achieve.

We are creating a virtual college that builds upon the work of the virtual school and continues to aspire, track and support care experienced young people to access a range of opportunities including work experience and apprenticeship programmes tailored to the needs of Care Experienced Young People.

Housing, benefits, and support team.

Whilst we improve our housing offer, we are developing a co-located housing, benefits, and support team with our 16+ Service. The team will review all legacy 'temporarily housed' Care Experienced Young People to find new stable homes. The team will work closely with the new joint Housing and Childrens Social Care Panel to ensure that young people are supported to identify suitable accommodation and offer support to access benefits and support.

Health Service.

We are providing additional health services to our Care Experienced Young People in conjunction with our health colleagues. This will consist of two specialist nurses to support and provide interventions to Care Experienced young people to reduce the impact on long term, physical and mental health, particularly in addressing the impacts of trauma and psychological harm.

Pledge to Care Leavers

Croydon's Looked After Children and Care Experienced Young Person Pledge. 2020

Our commitments to you as our Looked after Children:

1. Help you with your social life and to keep contact with your family where safe to do so.
2. We will help you to access positive social and educational activities.
3. We will make sure your learning continues into later life by supporting you to consider higher education.
4. We will provide you with a place to live that is safe and happy for you.
5. We will provide you with the right help to meet all your needs and to celebrate who you are.
6. We will support you in moving on from care and prepare you for living independently.
7. We will make sure we know your needs and review our plans to meet them regularly.
8. We will involve you in decisions which affect you and we will take your wishes and feelings taken into account.
9. We will ensure you have a social worker/personal advisor, to support you, and for you to be able to contact them easily.
10. We will support you to return home if it safe and right for you.
11. We will ensure you have access to high quality good education at all stages of your childhood.
12. If you request it, we will help you see the records we hold about you.
13. We will respect you as an individual with your own identity.

Local Offer for Care Leavers.

The Local Offer to Care Experienced Young People in Croydon covers: -

- Details of Housing and Homes available.
- A full guide to available financial support and guidance on managing money.
- Education, training and employment opportunities with links to schemes, programmes and jobs
- Health and wellbeing including a comprehensive guide on the Health Service for Care

Leavers, physical health, mental health, sexual health, young parents, smoking, drugs and alcohol and staying safe services. Access to your health passport.

- Relationships with immediate and extended family, building positive relationships, And developing a good support network.
- Participating and contributing in the wider community through volunteering, membership of groups and opportunities to influence and make services better.
- Specific support available to Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)
- How young people can have their say on their experience of our services available to them.

The Local Offer to Care Leavers is in the process of being updated and can be found at: <https://www.croydon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2021-01/Local-Offer-Care-Leavers-Jan21.pdf>

Focus for this strategy 23-25

The Croydon Care leaver strategy is closely aligned to the Croydon Corporate Parenting Strategy. The priority areas for us to deliver improvements on during this period are: - Housing and Homes, Education, Employment and Training, Permanence and Stability, Health, and Adult Transitions. We as a Council, with our partners have a programme of work to drive these improvements over the next three years, underpinned and informed by our commitment to equalities and monitoring of the equity of impact. For further information please check the public documents section of the website for updates on progress.