

Scrutiny Children & Young People Sub- Committee Supplementary Agenda



7. Experience of Care Leavers (Pages 3 - 8)

For the Sub-Committee to receive a report which will provide an opportunity to look at the experiences of Care Experienced Young People.

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Agenda Item 7

LONDON BOROUGH OF CROYDON

REPORT:	Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee
DATE OF DECISION	Tuesday 18 April 2023
REPORT TITLE:	Experience of Care Leavers
CORPORATE DIRECTOR / DIRECTOR:	Debbie Jones, Corporate Director CYPE Roisin Madden, Director of Childrens Social Care
LEAD OFFICER:	Shaun Hanks, Head of Children Looked After and Care Leavers Jane Scott, Subject Matter Expert
LEAD MEMBER:	Cllr Maria Gatland, Lead Member CYPE
AUTHORITY TO TAKE DECISION:	For information
KEY DECISION?	No
CONTAINS EXEMPT INFORMATION?	No
WARDS AFFECTED:	All

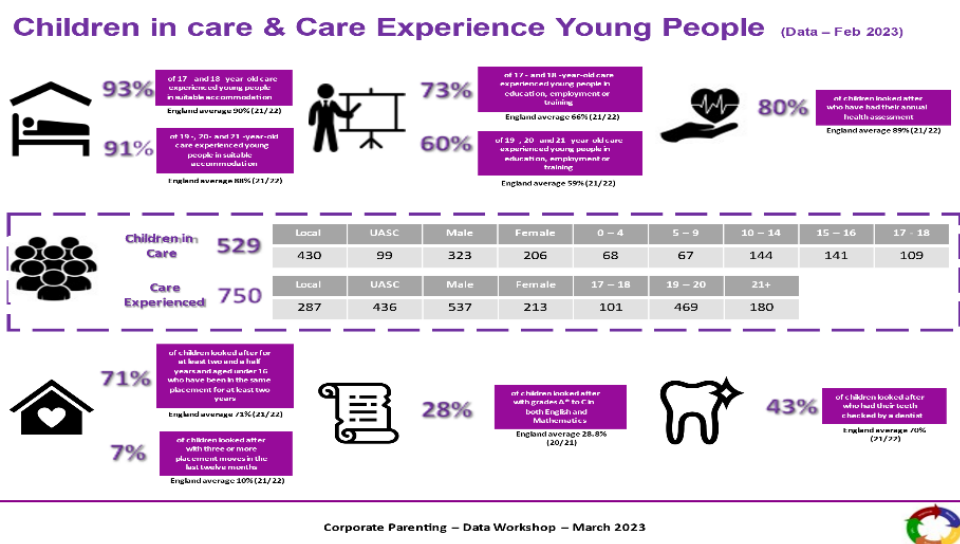
1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report outlines the position of Care Experienced young people in Croydon as assessed by Officers in the Annual Self-Assessment and Improvement plans and a recent review and recommendations by Mark Riddell, the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers, at the DFE. This information forms the basis of a plan to deliver on the critical areas identified to ensure that Croydon can evidence a 'Whole Council Approach' to improving the life chances of Care Experienced Young People.

2 BACKGROUND AND DETAILS

- 2.1 Children's services in Croydon were described as having improved dramatically since the last Ofsted inspection in 2017, when they were judged to be inadequate. This led to the overall judgement of Good whilst specifying that Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People 'Required Improvement' to achieve 'Good'.

- 2.2 Key areas identified for improvement were: -
- The quality of written pathway plans
 - Services for care leavers, in particular suitable accommodation, emotional health and preparation for independence.
- 2.3 The completion of young people's pathway plans has improved, and work is in progress to improve the quality of the plans, through training, supervision and improvement workers who can support the practice development directly with practitioners and managers. The position of suitable accommodation and services to support emotional health is part of the current partnership challenge which will be driven in a more focussed manner this year by the Corporate Parenting oversight and workplan.
- 2.4 Mark Riddell's review highlights the good work undertaken to progress the Corporate Parenting approach in Croydon and concurred that there is still more work to be undertaken. He acknowledged concerns about the slow pace of operational progress since the last inspection, with specific reference to housing and partnership offers i.e. health and adults; practice support for PA's in developing relationships with complex care leavers; and an absence of the voice of care experienced young people in co-production and championing all care experienced young people up to 25 years.



2.5 Croydon currently has 757 care leavers of which 57% are unaccompanied asylum seeking young people. 60% of care experienced young people are accessing Education, Employment or Training, which is higher than the national average. 91% of young people are viewed as being in 'suitable' accommodation in terms of tenancy and support, we know that the condition of some of the properties being offered are significantly below an acceptable standard.

These young people require support and guidance to ensure they achieve their aspirations and can improve their life chances. For Croydon Council there is a requirement that all Council departments act as a Corporate Parent and use the measure of 'is this good enough for my child'.

2.6 Ofsted has introduced a new, separate judgement to the framework for inspecting local authority children's services (ILACS) specifically about the experiences and progress of

care leavers. The Ofsted Framework evaluation criteria analysis of Croydon's services is below: -

- **Relationships and Participation**

There is evidence of good relationships between managers, social workers and personal advisors with care experienced young people. 95% of 17/18-year-olds, 98% of 19–21-year-olds experience being kept in touch with by their social worker/personal advisor. There is substantial improvement in this area. The development of an extended participation service is beginning to engage more young people in different contexts, within and outside of the local authority. This approach is engaging more voices and views to influence and shape services. We need to create a culture where more young people feel comfortable asking for help and receive a positive and proactive response more consistently. Young people can be supported by an advocacy and independent visitor service who are also able to support them with complaints. The complaints made by young people are particularly focussed in relation to poor housing options and the quality of provision, alongside concerns about communication and wanting more frequent visits and support from social workers and personal advisers.

- **Health and Emotional Well Being**

The inhouse Clinical Team will work with practitioners to support young peoples mental and emotional health. The LAC health assessments will monitor assessments that indicate specific mental/emotional health needs and make appropriate referrals. The challenge is what happens to Care Experienced young people and their emotional and mental health needs post 18 years. Universal services are not always appropriate for Care Experienced young people. We do not currently have a specific health pathway that meets their needs.. We need a health offer with our NHS commissioning partners that speaks to the specific needs of these young people and is creative in approach and engagement.

- **Local Offer for Care Leavers**

The Local Offer in Croydon for Care Leavers is improving its offer and includes free prescriptions, council tax exemption for 18–25-year-olds. Council and wider partnership input is required to ensure there is a multi-agency offer with oversight from the Corporate Parenting Panel. Priority areas for improvement include the housing offer quality and range to meet need, apprenticeships, input from DWP (Department of Works and Pensions) specific health offer, improved management/access into adult services.

- **Making good decisions for care leavers**

Decision making with Care Experienced young people is improving alongside the timeliness and quality of their plans. Further work is being developed to extend the Independent Reviewing Officers role in overseeing transition planning into early adulthood particularly for those young people with specific needs and vulnerabilities.

- **Help and Protection**

There is good oversight of the needs of vulnerable young people as part of Transitional Safeguarding planning which means that plans are developed to support those young people who need greater input, monitoring and support to help protect them when they leave care. Greater attention to the Corporate Parenting response to this area through more robust partnership working will build greater resilience into the help and protection of young people. i.e good quality housing in a safe environment, good employment, education opportunities, accessible health support and protocols with police and adult services will build greater protective factors for our young people.

- **Employment, Education and Training (EET)**

Croydon has a good baseline to build upon. 73% of our 17–18-year-olds are in Education, Employment or Training and 60% of our 19–21-year-olds are EET. We currently have 72 young people that we are supporting to complete a University Degree. We need to ensure more of our care experienced young people are EET. We are developing a Virtual College to build on the work of the Virtual School for Looked After Children. This work will be overseen by the Corporate Parenting Board through a subgroup to drive a whole Council and Partnership Approach. The offer will form the basis of a range of support and services to increase the opportunities for young people alongside our Employment, skills and economic development colleagues, engaging with our Digital service to develop an online presence to promote and ensure easy accessibility to information and help. Young people are active participants in developing the shape and delivery of the Virtual College.

- **Support into Adulthood including Housing.**

Care Experienced young people are experiencing improvements in their pathway plans timeliness and quality. Further resource is provided to assist practitioners to work with young people with vulnerabilities, challenges that require a greater level of skill and knowledge. Care Experienced young people should have a secure and stable home environment where they feel safe and able to develop their independence skills. This is a key area of concern where there are significant failings. Housing and Children's Social Care have developed key priorities for immediate and longer-term development. It is not possible to improve this area without considerable partnership working with Corporate Parenting Panel oversight to drive the priority activity. Greater attention and development to support young people to engage with positive and lifelong links with family and significant others in their lives to develop a positive identity and wellbeing.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

- 3.1 An Action Plan has been developed to drive the DFE recommendations in respect of Care Experienced Young People, which aligns with the current service plan activity. The key actions are as follows: -
 - The Corporate Parenting Strategy and Approach drives the Whole Council Approach
 - An Improved approach to housing pathways and quality of the offer.

- Develop health and adult transition pathways that are accessible and meet need.
 - Develop a Department of Works Partnership (DWP) Agreement to increase maximising benefits.
 - Promote and develop an effective 'whole council approach' to Employment, Education and Training opportunities.
 - To ensure that the practice model is developed and meets the needs of those young people with vulnerabilities and challenges up to 25 years. To ensure that Croydon's Local Offer is comprehensive, understood and accessible.
- 3.2 It is imperative that the Council adopt a 'Whole Council and Partnership Approach' to supporting the activity that is crucial to realising the best outcomes for our young people. Failure to support and drive this approach will result in poor outcomes against the action plan and in the lives of young people.
- 3.3 A commitment to this Action Plan will drive performance and outcomes for young people that we can be proud of as good Co-Parents.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

N/A

5. CONSULTATION

A consultation process has been completed.

6. CONTRIBUTION TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES

The plan outlined in this report speaks to the Council's Priorities.

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are financial implications to this plan. Many are achievable within current resources and developments applying a 'Whole Council and Partnership Approach'.

7.2 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

This plan allows Croydon to become more robust in delivering our legal duties.

7.3 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

This plan focusses on driving equalities for all of our children and young people.

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