



London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Corporate Parenting Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers 2023-2025

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1. Foreword	Page 2
2. Introduction	Page 2
3. Being a Corporate Parent	Page 4
4. What our data and performance tell us?	Page 5
5. What our children and young people say?	Page 6
6. Our practice	Page 7
7. Our promises	Page 8
8. Our enhanced Local Offer for Care Leavers	Page 14
9. Our future plans	Page 14

Foreword

As Lead Member for Social Care and Health Integration and Chair of the Members Corporate Parenting Group, I am proud to introduce the 2023 – 2025 children in care and care leavers corporate parenting strategy.

Our improvement journey 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 lived experiences, voices and improvements required as well as spending time with them and taking part in fun activities together.

This Corporate Parenting Strategy explains in detail the promises and commitments the Council and all our partners make to you, your family and those who work with you during your time in our care and to adulthood.

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 Jane Jones (Chair of the MCPG)

1. Introduction

This strategy sets out how we are planning to improve the way we support you. The strategy sits alongside many other key documents and services that help you, for example,

- Our Pledge to Children in Care and Care leavers.
- Our Children in Care Council and Care Leavers' Council Skittlz ensuring that your voices, life experiences, and views are at the centre of the work we do.
- Our enhanced and improved local offer for care leavers.
- Our re-designed Corporate Parenting Board meetings so that your views are at the heart of what we talk about. Colleagues from the NHS, Housing and Barking and Dagenham's councillors all come along to make sure that we are doing everything we can in Barking and Dagenham to support you.
- Our excellent Virtual School works with schools, colleges, training providers, other places of education and children's social care to support you to achieve all that you can during your time in education.

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.

Our Vision

In Barking and Dagenham, we care. We want the same things for the children and young people in our care and care leavers as any good parent would want for their child with no expiry date.

We want our children and young people to be safe, healthy, and happy in childhood. We want them to feel valued for who they are and to feel loved. We want them to enjoy learning and to benefit from their experience in school. We want them to grow into well adjusted, emotionally balanced, and resilient individuals who will experience positive relationships, be responsible citizens, fulfil the goals and ambitions they have for themselves and ultimately provide good parenting to their own children.

To achieve this, we must provide the highest quality care delivered through the services for which we are both responsible and accountable. Supporting children in care and young people leaving care to meet their potential and secure better and improved outcomes requires every single adult involved in their care – whether they work for the Local Authority, act as carers for the authority, or work for any of our many partners – taking individual responsibility to do their very best to help our children achieve their full potential.

Looking after and protecting children and young people is one of the most important jobs that councils do.

At the core of corporate parenting is improving the life chances of children in care and care leavers – protecting their welfare, promoting their wellbeing, enhancing their lives, and helping them reach their full potential.

This means that children in care should be cared about as well as cared for and that all aspects of their health, development and wellbeing should be promoted and assured.

The core principles of our strategy are to:

- Keep our children and young people safe in a family setting (wherever possible), with opportunities to forge positive relationships, achieve their full potential in education, employment, or training.
- Promote our children's physical and mental wellbeing.
- Listen to our children's voices, take their wishes and feelings into account whilst securing the best outcomes for them.
- Celebrate each child and young person's uniqueness and have high aspirations for them.
- Prepare our children for adulthood and independent living.

In order to do this, we will always ask:

- If this was my child, would it be good enough for her/him?
- If I was that child, would it be good enough for me?
- How could I make it better?
- How will I know that s/he has done well and are they happy and successful?

2. Being a Corporate Parent

Our Member Corporate Parenting Group 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.

Within the Local Authority, a number of services make a particular contribution to fulfilling the role of the corporate parent. These are set out below and not exhaustive but outline the key areas of responsibility:

- Children's Care and Support provides social work services, arrangements for placements and services for children in care and care leavers.
- Adults Care and support – The Children and Young People with Disabilities Team provides social work services, arrangements, and placements for disabled children into their adulthood.
- Children's Commissioning provides the Independent Reviewing Officer Service, the Quality Assurance function, commissioned services and performance management and outcomes.
- Education provides arrangements through the Aspire Virtual School and Special Educational & Disability (SEND) Services.
- Support is provided through the Children's Rights Service, the Independent Visitor Scheme, Careers Advice, and the independent advocacy service.
- Community Solutions helps to support looked after children and care leavers through universal services including the Job Centre, benefits advice and support and Housing.
- Youth Offending Services participate in helping young people at risk of offending or in custody and returning to the community.

- Leisure services support access to activities for carers, children, and young people.

A wide range of partner agencies are also closely involved and have a vital contribution to make to improving outcomes for children in care and young people leaving care. Again, these are set out here but are not exhaustive:

- Schools play a pivotal role in promoting children and young people's education along with pastoral support and the encouragement for extra-curricular activities.
- Colleges and universities support children and young people pursuing their education and gaining qualifications.
- The Police work with Children's Care and Support to safeguard looked after children and young people leaving care, including joint work when children go missing or are at risk of child exploitation.
- Health services provide the Dedicated Doctor and Specialist Nurse for children in care as well as universal health services.
- CAMHS are crucial in providing our children with support for their emotional and mental health and wellbeing.
- Opticians and dentists provide regular health checks.
- Independent Fostering Agencies and private providers of Residential Homes for children give additional options to meet children and young people's needs, often when more complex.
- Home Office for unaccompanied minors.

Our Lead Member is passionate and ambitious for you all and that we should all have the highest aspirations for you. This has resulted in an overhaul of Corporate Parenting in Barking and Dagenham to ensure it is child focused and

relational at all times. This is providing vigorous challenge and accountability to both the Council and partners regarding all key responsibilities as a Corporate Parent.

3. What our data and performance tell us?

The following section provides an overview of the numbers of children and young people we currently support in Children's Care and Support services, and performance at a glance.

At the end of 2022/23, the number of children in our care increased to 430 compared to 413 in the previous year. This corresponds to a rate of 67 per 10,000 children, which remains higher than the London rates but lower than national and statistical rates. Over half (54%) were males and 46% were females.

During 2022/23, the number of new children coming into care increased from 203 to 252, an increase of 49 children (24%) and 235 children left care – an increase on the 181 in the previous year.

Of the 430 children in care at the end of 2022/23:

- 312 (73%) lived with foster and kinship carers - up 2% on the 293 in the previous year.
- 44 (10%) were in residential care. This is a decrease on the on the 2021/22 figure of 51 (12%) and the proportion remains below London, national and statistical neighbour averages.
- 15 children in care (3%) were placed with parents – down 3 on the 18 in 2021/22.

- 50 (12%) were in semi-independent placements - up 5 from the 45 in 2021/22.
- 5 (2%) were in adoptive placements with prospective adopters at year end, lower than the previous year of 6 children (2%).
- 41% placed in the borough – up 2% on last year.

At the end of 2022/23, 318 young people 18 plus were care leavers, of which 102 were former UASC. This is a slight increase on the previous year of 312 care leavers (110 former UASC). The number of UASC looked after children aged under 18 decreased to 27 (0.04%) at the end of 2022/22 compared to 29 (0.04%) in 2021/22 and numbers remained below threshold set at 0.1% (64 children).

Headline Performance (provisional 2022/23)

- The majority of children in care are living with foster families (73%)
- The majority of children in care are visited every 6 weeks at 89% - better than 2021/22 performance (82%).
- Few children in care experience more than 3 plus placements and performance is at 13%. This is above target (11%) and benchmarks (10%), but no change on 2021/22.
- The majority of children in care have long term placement stability at 72%, above target (69%) and the 70% reported in 2021/22, as well as above national, London and statistical neighbours (70-71%).
- During 2022/23, 4 children were adopted (12 less than the 16 in than 2021/22), representing 2% of all children leaving care - below London (4%) and similar areas/national rates (10%).

- 25 children (10%) had become subject to special guardianship orders (SGOs), higher than the 2021/22 figure of 17 children (9%). We are in line with the London and similar areas averages but below the national average (14%).
- Almost all of our children in care have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) at 97%.
- Most of our children in care make good progress and attainment for our children in care remains above national children in care average.
- Most of our children in care are in good or outstanding schools.
- An above average proportion of our care leavers are in education, employment, or training (61%).
- Almost all of our care leavers are living in suitable accommodation (91%)

4. What our children and young people say?

We ask our children in care and care leavers what Barking and Dagenham can do to make your lives better and to keep to our promises we make to you. You said we did is at the heart of MCPG, and young people lead our meetings regularly.

Here are some of your key messages you have told us for your social worker, personal adviser, and foster carer to know and us at MCPG.

We need more support around the time of transition – new school, new placements, moving into independent living.

Very organised, always with a big smile on her face and reachable during working hours – getting the basics right!

Be honest with us even if we might not like what you say

I am so happy with my foster carer. I feel totally safe. She supports me to make decisions. We cook. She is funny and makes me laugh. She encourages me to do things and we go to places.

*More choice about who you live with (heritage, family make-up e.g. Other children in the home) - ask young people for their preferences and accommodate **IF** possible*

I like to live with this family because is fun and my carer reminded me of my mum. I feel like I'm with my real family.

The great communication between me and you has been so helpful.

6. Our Practice CARES

CARES Practice Framework

In Barking and Dagenham, we are committed to a whole system approach to achieving our vision and shared outcomes for babies, children, young people, and their families which will be further embedded within our CARES values and practice model which provides the overarching approach for the way we work together in a relational way.

Barking and Dagenham CARES values

- Compassion: kindness at the heart of all we do.
- Accountability: we do what we say we will do; our word can be trusted.
- Respect: each child's lived experience matters.
- Empowerment: we are the catalyst for change in children's lives.
- Sharing: through participation we hear and act on the voices of our children - nothing about you, without you.

Before a child is taken into care

Most children are likely to thrive and achieve good outcomes if they are cared for within their own families. Preventive services and early intervention to support children in need should be provided to give them every chance to remain within their families.

Our Specialist Intervention Service (SIS) offers a range of services to support children remaining within their families which includes:

Family Group Conferencing to explore how the family and friends network can support parents to keep their children in their care or identify alternative carers for children if they cannot remain with their parents/

Restorative intervention services for children to rebuild relationships with the parents or carers.

Family Support Workers who offer practical support and guidance to parents and carers to enhance their parenting skills. These offers are bespoke to the needs to the family and can include evening and weekend support.

The SIS also has a volunteer offer that can offer low level family support to ensure that families are supported in the early stages of difficulties emerging.

Therapeutic services with a number of play therapists who support children who have experienced trauma which is impacting on their wellbeing and stability with the family or carers. The therapists ensure that the children's parents or carers are included in this work so they understand the issues for the children.

7. Our Promises

Promise 1. To make sure you get the best care, we promise to

1. **Give you your own social worker and tell you who you can contact when they are not available.** We will allocate you a social worker if you are in care and provide you with a Leaving Care Advisor if you are a care leaver. This is your entitlement to ensure that you are seen and listened to, with up to date assessments and plans that meet your needs.
2. **Involve the Children in Care Council (Skittlz) in reviewing how well we are keeping our promises to you and what we might need to do differently.** Skittlz is a group which represents the voice of children and young people and is made up of children in care and care leavers. We promise to increase the membership and development of Skittlz so that all children and young people are well represented, and their views are of significance and influence to make a difference.

We promise to have a new Participation Co-Ordinator and a Participation Apprentice in post by the autumn of 2023. They will focus on developing participation, engagement, and consultation activities so that all of our children and young people placed in other parts of the country have their views considered. We promise to keep track of 'You Said, We Did' capturing all of your views and requests from Skittlz consultations and do what we can to action those in the Council and across the partners in the Members Corporate Parenting Group.

3. **Make sure adults, such as carers, social workers, Council Members, and senior managers, get the right training to understand the issues and challenges you are facing.** There is a commitment to ensure training is provided across council and partner agencies so that carers, workers, senior leaders, and Members get the right training to understand issues and challenges that affect children in care and care leavers. The training programme includes My Care, Let's Care training provided by the Children's Rights Officer and young people who are care experienced. We also want social workers to have training in key areas such as child development, attachment, neglect and communicating with children and young people.
4. **Talk to you about when you and your family can see or contact each other and support travel arrangements. If you cannot see or contact your family, we promise to explain and tell you why.** Family time contact is an especially important part of the plan of care for any child or young person who is looked after. Arrangements for family time will be discussed regularly and are an essential part of your review meetings. Support will be provided for family time contact including transport or costs for travel. If, for any reason, family time cannot take place as arranged or is not considered to be safe, we will explain the reasons why to you. For very young children who may be adopted, an explanation about seeing their family and whether and when this takes place will be provided as part of a Later in Life letter and/or life story work.
5. **Keep your brothers and sisters together, wherever possible.** Keeping brothers and sisters together wherever possible is a key principle in the

Council's permanence policy for children in care when making plans. If it is not possible for you and your brothers and sisters to be together, we will explain this, and appropriate arrangements made for you to see each other.

6. **Make sure you meet with your Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) before your review, so you can share your thoughts about your care.** We promise to provide you with an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) who will review and check your care plan and progress making sure any agreed actions to meet needs are being taken. An important part of the IRO role is that your views and issues are shared before the review meeting.
7. **Share the good things that you have done in your review and discuss issues you feel are important.** Your review meeting will cover a range of issues to ensure your needs are being met and that appropriate services are in place for you. It is equally important to ensure that the review meeting covers issues which are important to you and that good things that you have done or achieved are talked about, recognised, celebrated, and further supported.
8. **Support you to make a complaint if you need to.** Every child or young person in care is entitled to make a complaint and to do this with the support of her/his social worker or carer, or the Children's Rights Officer or Advocacy Service depending on the nature of the complaint.
9. **Provide a Children's Rights Service and an independent advocate to speak for you if you want them to.** While each child or young person in care can speak with her/his social worker and Independent Reviewing Officer, a request can also be made for the involvement of the Children's Rights Officer

or an Independent Advocate. This provides an additional source of listening to you and your views, ensuring that your voice is heard.

Promise 2: To look after you and keep you safe, we promise to

1. **Make sure your social worker does not change unless there is a good reason for it.** There are benefits for children and young people who are in care or leaving care to have continuity of support from a social worker or, if over 18, a Leaving Care Advisor (LCA). Continuity of social worker/LCA is important for the child or young person, so they can develop trust and confidence with the same person, while it also allows the social worker/LCA to get to know the child or young person and understand her/his needs. We recognise that stability in the Children's Social Care workforce can be an issue and that this can lead to changes in social worker while recruitment of more permanent staff takes place. If, for good reason, there is a change this should be explained to the child or young person. Importantly, steps must be taken to ensure that there is continuity of service and an allocated social worker or LCA in place to provide the required service and support.
2. **Make sure your social worker stays in touch and visits you regularly to see how you are.** It is important that children and young people in care or having left care are seen and visits made so that the social worker or LCA keeps in touch, is aware of their views and can build a positive relationship. The frequency of visits and seeing the child or young person will vary and should be agreed according to the plan in place and the needs of the child. There are minimum standards for visits to see children in care and these are

reported on a regular basis. There are also arrangements in place to ensure we keep in touch with care leavers.

3. **Write a Care Plan or Pathway Plan which is all about you and your needs and which is looked at regularly.** Each child or young person in care or Care Leaver will have a plan which is based on the assessment of her/his needs and takes their views into account. The plan will describe and set out the actions to be taken to meet these needs and the responsibilities of the social worker/LCA, carers and partner agencies to achieve them. There is an updated version of a pathway plan that ensures easy ways for young people to assess their own needs and what areas are important for them to focus on. A new care plan format is currently in development.
4. **Listen to you, be honest and take notice of what you want.** It is especially important to listen to children and young people and make sure that their views are represented and recognised. This is a crucial part of good practice in caring for children and young people who are looked after or are Care Leavers. It is equally important for actions to be identified and taken to support what the child or young person wants wherever appropriate and possible and to explain why this cannot happen when these situations arise.
5. **Talk to you about why decisions are made and explain this clearly in a way you can understand.** Children and young people deserve honesty in responding to their views and explanations about the decisions, plans and actions which are made and put in place to meet their needs. As they grow up, children and young people should feel valued and that their views are

listened to and acted on and should be helped to know and understand their individual story.

6. **Make sure you are in a placement that is suitable for you.** We will seek to provide high quality and stable placements for children in care that promote their resilience and attachment to care givers. Consideration must be given to retaining links with family and community. It is also important to consider the educational needs of the child or young person and wherever possible provide continuity of school. This should be discussed with the Virtual School when planning a placement.

Promise 3: To keep you healthy, we promise to

1. **Make sure you have regular health, dental and eye check-ups.** The physical and mental health needs of you may have been poorly addressed in early years. It is therefore important to ensure that you have your needs routinely assessed and responded to as they arise.
2. **It is a statutory obligation to ensure that you have an annual health assessment (6 monthly for under-fives).** However, it is important for this to be a meaningful review of the child's health needs and not just a tick box exercise. We want to ensure all health assessments take place as required and that these are an excellent quality to be effective for the health of children in care. Regular dental and eyesight checks are also arranged.

3. **Ensure that you have a regular assessment of your mental health and emotional wellbeing** using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire as part of every health assessment. We will ensure that CAMHS provides targeted support to children in care where this is required both within the borough and for children placed out of borough elsewhere.
4. **Ensure you are given every encouragement to eat healthily and live healthy lives.** Key messages about diet and exercise will be given through carers, the Specialist Nurse for children in care and others coming into contact with children in care. Support and advice will be provided for young people who are parents. The Specialist Nurse can also provide advice about sexual health matters.
5. **Make sure you have opportunities to do fun things and get to know other children in care.** We will support our children by taking part in a wide range of activities that reflect their interests and talents, and which will enrich their overall quality of life. By taking part in cultural, leisure and sporting activities, our children are more likely to become healthy, gain confidence, develop self-esteem and enjoy positive social experiences. Children and young people will also have opportunities to build friendships and develop healthy peer networks.
6. **Provide allowances for you to do activities and access our leisure centres for free if you are a care leaver.** Children and young people are supported to do activities through financial arrangements which provide allowances to carers to support and fund interests, hobbies, sports, and leisure activities. Care leavers are supported to have free access to the leisure centres in

Barking and Dagenham. This includes taking a friend for free too. Still trying to nail down the offer for LAC and foster carers. I will also add there that we will pay for local authority gym memberships in other areas for those that do not have access to LBBD resources – it is not currently explicit.

Promise 4: To help you get the best possible education, we promise to

1. **Make sure that you have a place at a good nursery or school that will help you to do your best.** It is imperative that disruption to education is minimised or avoided when considering placements for children and young people. Staff will consult with the Virtual School and the SEND team if appropriate, so that the choice of nursery or school can be considered, although this can be difficult when placements are made in an emergency. We aim to place children and young people in care in academic establishments rated as 'good' or 'outstanding.'
2. **Work with your school and Designated Teacher to help you do your best by having a termly Personal Education Plan (PEP).** Many children in care will need considerable support to succeed in education. The Virtual School works closely with the school, Social Worker and SEND team where appropriate to understand the educational needs of each child and secure sufficient help for each child.

3. **Use your PEP as a useful tool to focus the efforts of all professionals to help you fulfil your potential.** The PEPs provide a forum for the school to provide updates on each young person, informing professionals about your strengths and areas of growth. The best PEPs are ambitious, detailed and provide an effective focus for action.
4. **Use your PEP to write targets aimed at supporting your areas of growth.** The PEP aims to ensure that the voice of the child/young person is heard, and their needs are the focus of the PEP.
5. **Arrange packages of individual support for you, for example, supporting you with behavioural difficulties to focus on a particular lesson.** Schools receive the Pupil Premium Plus funding for each child and Virtual School staff will work with schools to make the best use of this funding to promote the learning needs of children and young people in care. This funding can be used by school to provide specialist support for the individual child or support that can benefit a wider group including the looked after children. Some of the ways in which pupil premium plus have been used are: Teaching assistants to support on a short-term basis, 1:1 tuition – both for students who are waiting for a school place and as additional support, Mental health support, Educational Psychologists' reports to support with EHC assessments, Counselling, Play Therapy/Art Therapy, specialist mentoring, additional respite provision, in-school support for behaviour, Thrive training for schools, Specialist careers advice.
6. **Support Your Educational Transitions.** The Virtual School has two transition leads, one Key Stage 2-Key Stage 3 and one Key Stage 4-Key Stage 5 to help young people with the change of school. Another crucial aspect of transition is entering the world of work either directly or via a course of further education or training. We are committed to supporting young people to be in education, employment, or training (EET) and supporting them if they are not in education, employment, or training (NEET).
7. **The Virtual School promises to work with other partners to create opportunities for Care Leavers** to receive guidance and support for transitions through forums like University Network Meetings, Trips to Universities, referrals to apprenticeship and the Job Shop and a designated Key Stage 5 staff who facilitates the final PEP meeting before the young person turns 18 which focuses on transition guidance.
8. **Help you to get on the courses you want to study.** Children and young people will have interests and talents which should be supported and nurtured for their future opportunities. They will have subjects which they are interested in, have abilities in or are best suited for their future work and career prospects. As part of the PEP, the child or young person's abilities and interests in particular subjects and courses should be identified, and support given to do these.
9. **Celebrate your achievements and successes.** Achievements for individual children or young people in care, as with their peers, will vary according to her/his level of ability but should always be recognised and celebrated. At an individual level this can be done through the response which carers and social workers give to children and young people about their achievements and then acknowledged at the looked after child review.

10. **Further attention and recognition will be given to young people who are Care Leavers through the 'celebrating achievements' event.** For children in care, their achievements will be recognised at the summer Fun Days. Both events take place annually. The Aspire Virtual School also runs an awards scheme to celebrate the achievement of our students which are included in the awards events.

Promise 5: To help you be successful in life, we promise to

1. **Make sure that you are asked about important decisions which affect your life.** Children and young people in care will have regular opportunities to be asked for their views about important decisions which affect their lives. These opportunities include:

- Visits by her/his social worker
- Talking with carers
- Letting the Independent Reviewing Officer know her/his views
- Access to an Independent Visitor if you want this
- Support to have views heard and represented by the Children's Rights Officer or the independent Advocacy Service for children in care

2. **Seek your views as a standard of good practice and that this is taking place.** We will therefore ask managers and Independent Reviewing Officers to check this, check for this in assessment and planning work, check for this in audit work and ask children and young people through surveys of their views.

3. **Make sure that when you move from one service to another or leave our care, there is a plan in place that is suitable for you.** Moves between services or leaving care are important points of transition for children and young people. Plans must be in place to support this and provide oversight of the actions and service needed for the best interests of the child or young person.

4. **Provide you with support to live independently when you are ready.** Each young person who is looked after in care will have a Pathway Plan in place by their 16th birthday. This plan, based on an assessment of needs and considering the young person's wishes, will set out the route to living independently and identify the support and services to be offered to make this successful.

5. **Make sure you leave care with your savings.** Young people leave care with savings through the government scheme of opening Junior ISAs which can be accessed from the age of eighteen. In addition, the Council saves for children in care which we hold centrally within the Local Authority. These are entitlements for children and young people who have been in long-term care and are intended to assist in their start towards adulthood when they are 18. Young people can access their savings from the age of 18 by putting in a request to their LCA about what they want to use the money for, and this will be agreed as long as it's for an appropriate reason. Any balance left in your savings will be paid to the young person at the age of 21.

6. **Help you learn to manage money well.** As any good parent, we want to provide guidance and support for young people in managing their money.

Carers and LCAs will support young people in managing their money as an important part of the Pathway Plan, including work on budget skills, and managing finances each week. This will include setting up a rent account where appropriate, that requires rent to be paid either via benefits or by earnings for accommodation within the LBBD area. Support will also be provided to avoid any added pressures arising from debt.

7. **Help you get ready for the world of work, find a job, apprenticeship, or training placement.** We recognise the importance of young people being able to get a job as they move into adulthood. As part of this, the Pathway Plan should identify opportunities for further or higher education, training, work placements and apprenticeships. Young people should also receive support to apply for jobs or training, prepare for, and be equipped for, interviews.

8. Our Enhanced Local Offer for Care Leavers

Section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires each local authority to consult on and publish a Local Offer for its care leavers up to the age of 25. The Local Offer should provide information about all the services and support that is available to care leavers from the local authority, including information about both their statutory entitlements and any discretionary support that a local authority chooses to provide.

Following consultation with Care Leavers, the Enhanced Local Offer document was updated in 2021 to reflect their comments and to ensure that it contained

information that Care Leavers themselves had said that they wanted and needed to transition into adulthood and independent living.

As such we have put together a local offer which covers health and wellbeing, relationships, education and training, employment, housing/accommodation, Care Leavers leaving custody, Care Leavers who are parents, financial entitlements.

We have been successful in recruiting our own Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Worker specifically for Care Leavers, who will benefit from emotional support individually or in groups.

Enhanced Local Offer to Care Leavers

Our Lead Member and Chief Executive are leading further work to ensure it is a 'fit-for-purpose' Enhanced Local Offer, ensuring:

- The united commitment and contribution by every part of the Council and its partners to the corporate parenting principles.
- It takes account of the feedback from care leavers.

9. Our future plans 2023/2025

- 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.

- Continue to implement and monitor progress against the DfE Care Leavers Improvement plan.
- 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.
- Have a clear record of 'You Said, We Did' actions that arise from Skittlz feedback, surveys, other consultations, so that young people, carers, and staff know what has changed as a result of young peoples' views being taken into consideration. This will be shared at every Members Corporate Parenting Group, where Skittlz representatives will be attending.
- Annually refresh the Enhanced Local Offer for Care Leavers, taking account of young people's views and changes in legislation and practice.
- Develop a Local Offer for children in care under 16, in consultation with Skittlz.
- 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.
- 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.
- Embed the new Permanence Policy to ensure consistency across all services to achieve a timely permanence plan for every child and young person.
- 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.
- Support social workers and LCAs to help children and young people better understand their journey in care and to use creative ways to help tell their story.
- Implement the new recruitment campaign for attracting foster carers from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences to meet the changing needs of our children in care.

- Support our carers and children with the development of Mockingbird hubs over the next 3 years so that the majority of carers and children are linked to a hub by 2026.
- Work with our Commissioning Service to ensure compliance with the new regulations regarding 16+ units to ensure the highest quality provision for our younger care leavers.
- Work with our Health partners to ensure that Initial Health Assessments are of quality and undertaken on time.
- Ensure that our Care Leavers leave care with full information about their health histories in a format that suits them.
- Continue to monitor and ensure that PEPs are completed on a termly basis to ensure the interventions are leading to progress for all children and young people.
- The participation staff will be in place and reaching a wider cohort of our children and young people.