

REPORT TO:	Corporate Parenting Panel 11th November 2020
SUBJECT:	Engagement and Achievements, Complaints and Leaving opportunities
LEAD OFFICER:	Rodica Cobarzan Head of Children Looked After and Leaving Care Service
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr Alisa Flemming Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning
WARDS:	All
PUBLIC/EXEMPT:	

SUMMARY OF REPORT:
POLICY CONTEXT/AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON:
<p>Include here a brief statement on how the recommendations address one or more of the Council's Corporate Plan priorities:</p> <p>Corporate Plan for Croydon 2018-2022</p>
FINANCIAL IMPACT:
<i>None.</i>
RECOMMENDATIONS:
<p>To note the achievements and successes of LAC children, complaints that LAC children have made and what has been done about it, and also what the leaving opportunities are/have been for care leavers.</p>

1. Key achievements and success of LAC Children

E.M.P.I.R.E summer programme for CLA

- 1.2** The EMPIRE Team summer offered an unprecedented 72 activity sessions for young people aged 8-18 covering local and online events across the borough; all bookable by email and ranging from 1hr -3 days duration. A total of 85 different young people accessed this provision in total which is the greatest ever involvement we've seen.
- 1.3** We worked very hard on communication and publicity this year through the Young Croydon website and social media. We were really pleased with the

take up from colleagues in Children's social care and early help teams in supporting the young people they work with to book onto activities.

- 1.4** There was a well-attended dedicated 'Youth Voice Day' for organisations to bring young people (not just CLA) they are working with together with the Youth Engagement Team supported groups (locality youth forums, young mayor and deputy, CYAC and Empire).
- 1.5** A direct outcome of this is a series of yearlong events –led by our CLA- debating and advocating on issues of race and ethnicity- chaired by the young mayor.
- 1.6** A consultation session has taken place between our Care Leavers forum and the Planning department. This explored the future development of Croydon area and ideas about how to best make this reflect young people's needs and wishes. This work will be ongoing.
- 1.7** The Young Mayors' careers event on 21st August at BoxPark; for all young people who may want to consider their education, training and career options whether they are waiting for exam results or not. Speakers and providers picked by the young mayor and deputy.
- 1.8** The Youth Engagement Team also offered 9 additional targeted sessions over the summer for looked after young people, children and young people living in temporary accommodation along London Road and those vulnerable to having a poor transition from primary to secondary school. These were accessed by CLA in some cases.
- 1.9** Over 65 UASC young people attended a mixture of online and in person sessions over the first 3 weeks of August. All socially distanced and CV19 secure we were able to provide vital social opportunity and teaching in English and Mathematics daily to groups of 15 young people at a time. Feedback was unanimously positive and the only critiques were that they wished we had more available for longer periods.
- 1.10** Our first ever KS1 and 2 literacy and communication development pilot took place for a week in August based at the ARC animal education centre in Selsdon. This took some serious CV-19 preparation including bubble setup and teaching handwashing procedures and mask wearing. However we felt it was too vital an experience for the 10 children to miss. The group, all aged 6-11 accessed a whole range of animal care tasks from feeding, cleaning and handling, to designing enclosures and learning all about the exotic collection which includes Meerkats, Skunks, Sugar babies and tortoises .Evaluations form parents and carers showed that 100% children wanted to continue and to attend again.
- 1.11** Apprenticeships begin (October 2020)- 3 new colleagues have joined the VS team as Young Director, Assistant Director and soon a participation youth worker. These colleagues beat an exceptional field to these newly designed

roles as advocates and champions for the voice and experience of E.M.P.I.R.E.

2. Complaints from LAC and Care Leavers

- 2.1 During 2019-2020 there were 56 complaints in total from children in care and care leavers.
- 2.2 Complaints received for children in care related to poor communication with between children, their families and professionals. Concerns are also raised regarding the lengthy process for assessments, including age assessments and the lack of clarity regarding the process. Concerns were also received regarding Social Workers completing home visits without prior notice.
- 2.3 Care leavers complaints usually relate to delays in service provision, a lack of customer empathy and poor communication. A significant proportion of these complaints relate to and are often prompted by housing issues. Specifically the lack of affordable, sustainable and suitable accommodation and the lack of availability of social housing.
- 2.4 Resolutions include ongoing support further advice, housing repairs and savings being paid.
- 2.5 With the Complaints and FOI Coordinator working closely with Managers, turnaround times and responses have improved from 43% to 64%.
- 2.6 There have also been a number of other improvements. Regular service meetings discussing managing complaints and dealing with complaints is also now a priority, which has also increased everyone's awareness on the importance of dealing with complaints. The detail of what goes into a response has also improved, with Service Managers and Team Managers providing more information in their response.
- 2.7 Responses to care leavers has improved significantly. The service manager now meets with our commissioned advocacy service (Barnardo's) monthly to review the progress of complaints, to better understand the role of the advocate and to help advocates understand our legal duties to young people and the barriers to resolving housing issues. We have kept Barnardo's informed of service developments and opened up a much better line of communication. The number of escalations has reduced as a result.

3. Leaving care opportunities

- 3.1 Currently, 62% of our young people aged 18-21 are engaged in education, training or employment. Covid 19 has had an impact, particularly on those previously engaged in employment. We have put in place measures to help provide a greater number of opportunities:
 - In May of 2020, a full time NEET prevention Officer was appointed to the Post 16 Participation & NEET Service and is based in the Leaving Care

Service. She is the conduit between external providers and employers and the leaving Care Service and also carries out direct work with young people to link them with opportunities.

- A new group – CLIPP (Care Leavers in Poverty Prevention) has been established with representatives from the DWP, Youth Engagement and NEET services, Leaving Care staff and educational establishments.
- 5 apprenticeship posts have been established and recruited to. All in post by 05/10/20. 2 are based in the Virtual school and will be championing mentoring schemes for young people which will promote education and mentoring opportunities
- As part of the new local offer, incentives such as driving lessons are being made available to young people to remain in education.

3.2 *Analysis of the data*

3.3 Of the 245 (40%) who are NEET;

- 38 are unable to work or study due to illness or disability.
- 17 young people are not in education, training or employment due to pregnancy or parenting.
- 17 are in custody
- 32 young people are “all appeal rights exhausted” and unable to work or continue in education

3.4 *Next Steps/future plans*

- Establish NEET panel for 16+ supporting young people transition to leaving care with internal and external stakeholders.
- Strengthen the role and influence of Personal Advisers for young people aged 16+ rather than 18+ through a much earlier allocation of a PA. This will improve post 18 planning, including access to education, training and employment and ensuring that aspirations are high.
- Plan to develop and Educational Championship scheme across Croydon Council senior leadership team and members
- We believe that young people are more likely to achieve when remaining living with their foster carers beyond age 18. We are revising the Staying Put policy and procedures alongside a package of training to foster carers and their staff support with a view to increasing the number of young people Staying Put.
- Young people tell us that affordable accommodation is vital when considering whether to progress to higher education. A review of accommodation is taking place which is aimed to widen the accommodation offer.

4. **DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS** **N/A**

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APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT

None.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None