

Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2021 - 2022

be the change
for children and young people in croydon



Forward



Councillor Alisa Flemming
Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel
Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning

Welcome to our Corporate Parenting Annual Report, which details the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel and our services to children looked after and care experienced young people. During the last two years the Corporate Parenting Panel has embraced the virtual meeting environment and the challenges presented. The involvement of children and young people in the meetings has been invaluable in providing new perspectives and keeping our focus upon what matters.

As elected Members, the role of a 'Corporate Parent' is a collective responsibility that we all share. Many of our children looked after and care experienced young people will have faced difficulties in their early years that will place them amongst the most disadvantaged in our society if we do not provide the care, stability and support needed to help them achieve their ambitions.

The work of E.M.P.I.R.E [which stands for Empowerment. Memories. Positivity. Interesting. Respect & Education], who are our Children in Care Council, and the feedback we receive from other children and young people, play an integral part in how we continue to improve services for children. Listening and acting upon the voices of our children with care experience help us to keep focus on what really matters in order to influence development and delivery of services in the right way.

As Lead Member and Corporate Parent, I want the best for all our children. I am proud of their achievements, and we must continue to create opportunities to celebrate their successes with them at every level. It is often said that the small things are the greatest and we must never underestimate how important a word of encouragement can be. I am extremely grateful to the members of EMPIRE for the regular attendance at the Panel, it has been a real privilege to work with them throughout the year.

As a council it remains important that we continue to be ambitious and strive to be the best Corporate Parents and Corporate Family we can be. We must remain committed to doing everything that we can to support our children so that they can benefit from the many opportunities our borough has to offer.

Our ambition is that all children and young people in Croydon will be safe, healthy and happy, and will aspire to be the best they can be. The future is theirs.

Everyone can play their part in this – from businesses and the voluntary sector to families who can offer a foster home to those children who need one.

Our annual report is a summary of the work presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel in 2021-2022 and is a celebration of the success, achievements and areas of improvement.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the achievements, progress and challenges in meeting the needs of Croydon's Children Looked After and Care Leavers in 2021/2022. This year saw the gradual lifting of Lockdown and new challenges for everyone, as we learnt to live with the impact of Covid. Children Looked After and Care Experienced Young People have been remarkable in the way they have managed the uncertainty that Covid presents, and their achievements at school, college and through groups such as EMPIRE show that their lives have not been 'on hold'.
- 1.2. 2021 saw the Children Looked After, Care Leavers and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Teams (UASC) restructured to focus on children under 16 and Young People aged 16 and above. We continue to provide support to UASC at the home office, undertake age assessments and look after unaccompanied children before they move to their long term homes across the country.
- 1.3. Despite the uncertainty and challenges of Covid performance for social work and personal adviser teams has been maintained or improved. Ensuring that plans are updated on time has been a struggle, however this has been improving since August. Children and Young People have been keen to meet face to face and EMPIRE has organised some popular and helpful events.
- 1.4. The Corporate Parenting Panel has been curious about disparities in children and young people's experience of care based on ethnic background. Nearly two thirds of Croydon's supported care leavers (care experienced) have been unaccompanied asylum seeking children. The needs and experience of Asian and Black children and young people will be a focus for our work in 2022/23.



2. Corporate Parenting Panel

- 2.1. The statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning, states that the Council has a responsibility to act as an effective and caring corporate parent for all children looked after and care leavers. There is a strong emphasis on improving educational attainment, providing stable and high quality placements and proper planning for when young people leave care. The council takes its responsibility for Children looked after and care leavers very seriously and closely monitors the services provided to these young people to ensure that all Children looked after and care leavers are safe, healthy and happy and aspire to be the best they can be.
- 2.2. The term 'Child Looked after' refers to any child or young person for whom the local authority has, or shares, parental responsibility, or for whom care and accommodation is provided on behalf of their parent/s. The term "child" can refer to any child or young person aged 0 to 18 years. The council also has a duty and responsibility to those young people who leave their long-term care from the age of 16 years until they reach the age of 25 years. In line with national developments, we are increasingly referring to our care leaver young people as 'care experienced'.
- 2.3. A cross-party Croydon Corporate Parenting Panel of elected members, looked after young people, foster carers and cross council senior officers has been in place since 2007. The panel provides governance and challenge to ensure that outcomes for Children looked after continue to improve via regular panel meetings throughout the year, meeting with young people to hear directly from them their views and experiences of service offered.
- 2.4. The panel will review outcomes for services to Children Looked After and Care Experienced Young People, including Management Information and Performance Indicators monitoring all aspects of Children in Care. The information reviewed by the panel includes:

The number and age range of Children Looked After;
Health information;

Distance children are placed from their home address;
Education attainment and attendance;
Personal Education Plan compliance;
The number of young people not in Education,
Employment or Training (NEET);
The number of statutory visits completed within the timeframe;
The number of Children and Young People who have up-to
date plans.

2.6. Our priorities for 2022-2023 are based on the analysis in this annual report, Ofsted recommendations and our broader understanding of our children looked after and care leavers we have identified the following actions as our priorities for the year ahead that we are already working on:

- Understand the experience of care that children and young people have and identify any disparity in experience based upon factors such as race.
- Improve our support and care for children and young people aged 16-25. Recognising their continued vulnerability alongside greater independence. (see Care Experienced Focus for 2022 p16)
- Ensure that there is a better understanding of why children and young people go missing, and identify what needs to change for individual children and young people.
- Continue to develop and work from a systemic understanding of children and young people's situation and experience, and understand behaviours through a Trauma Informed approach.
- Further increase the provision of local foster placements for children and young people so that they can be Happy, Health and 'Here'.

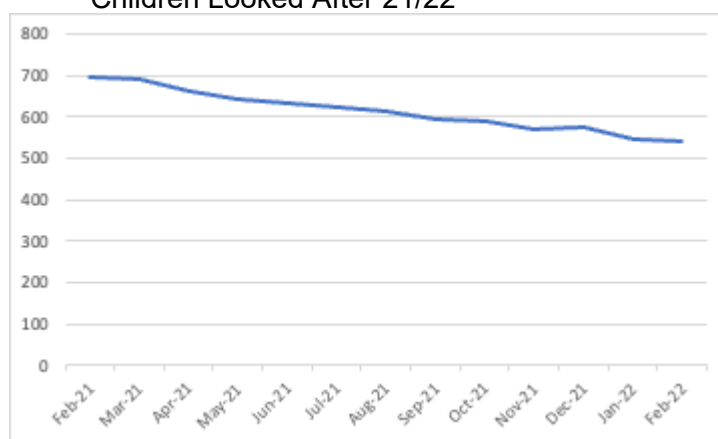
3. Children looked after: Demographics, health and education

3.1. The number of children that are looked after has reduced by 20% during 2021/22. With a rate of 56.7 children per 10,000 being looked after in Croydon. This continues to be higher than the statistical neighbour average of 51.8 per 10,000. If our Looked After Population is adjusted to include only the statutory number of UASC expected of local authorities (0.07% of child population) then Croydon's Looked After Population is the same as the statistical neighbours' average for 20/21-51.8 (500 children, compared to 540 children as at 28/2/2022)

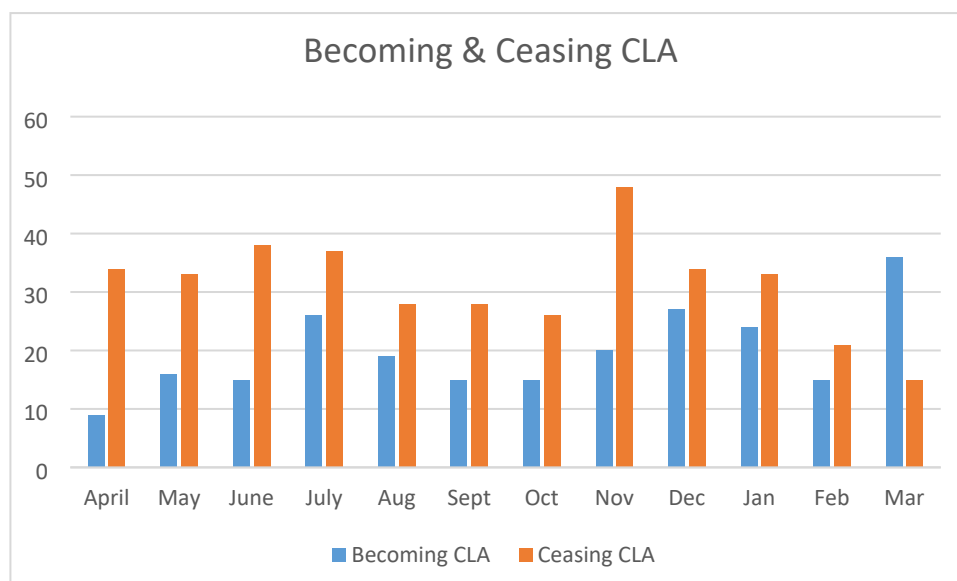


	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Croydon	87.00	83.00	81.00	86.00	85.00	72.8	56.7
Statistical Neighbours	56.30	54.20	54.60	53.70	52.8	51.8	Not published
England	60.00	62.00	64.00	65.00	67.00	67.00	Not published

Children Looked After 21/22



- 3.2. The number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children remaining looked after by Croydon has reduced again this year and is the main factor in the overall number of Children Looked After decreasing. With the National Transfer Scheme now mandatory for all local authorities' children and young people are moving quickly to the local authority that will provide care for them. This has seen UASC that are looked after by Croydon drop from 205 in April 2021 to 114 in March 2022, a reduction of 56%.
- 3.3. The overall reduction in children Looked after can be seen in the comparison of the number of children becoming looked after each month alongside the number of children ceasing to be looked after. Children reaching 18 will cease to be looked after and are then supported as a care leaver.



3.4. **Age & Gender:** The majority of our CLA are between 10-17 years old. Male children account for the majority of children looked after, however there has been an upturn of 6% in the proportion of female children looked after compared to the previous year.

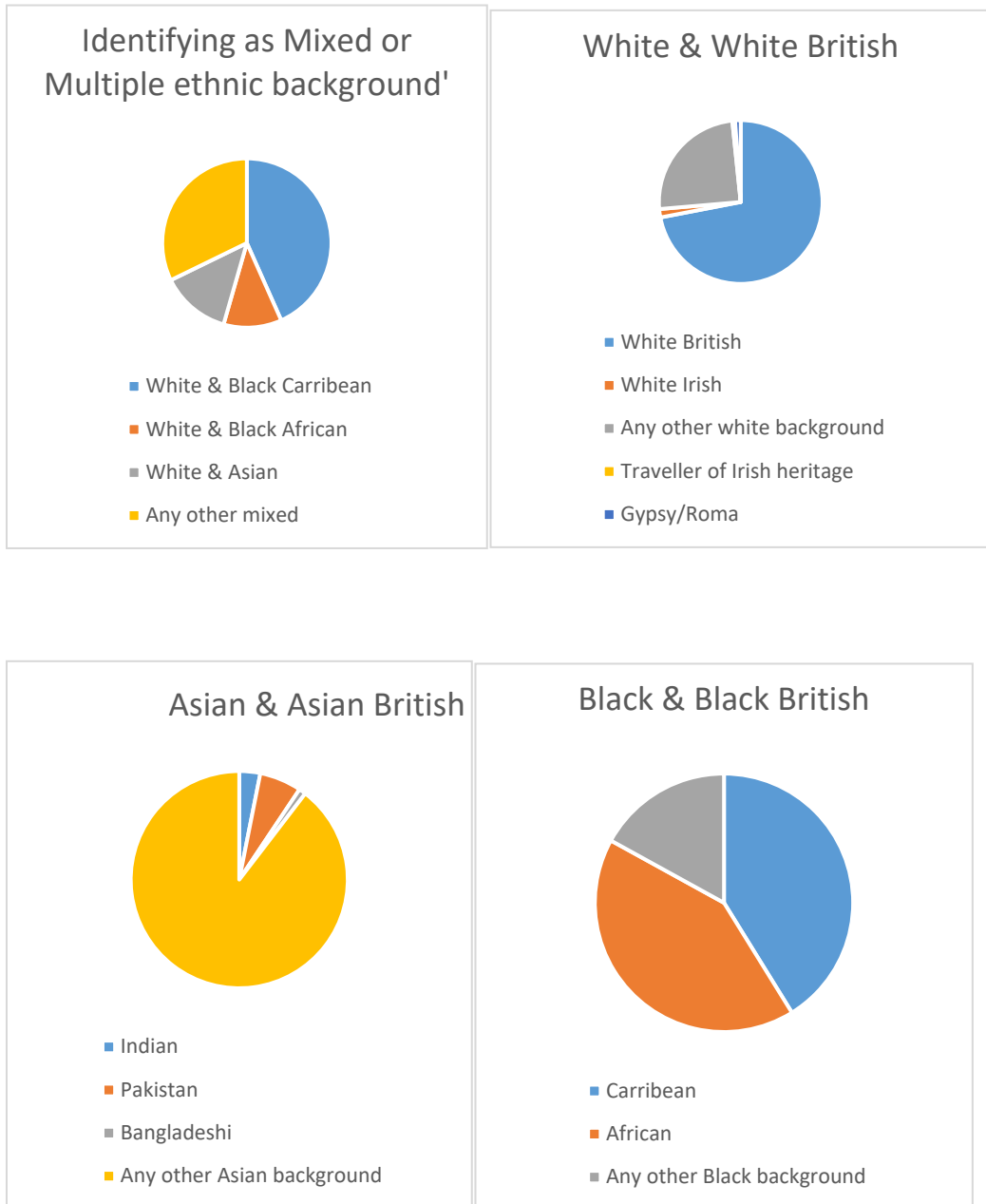
AGE AT 31 MARCH 2021			
MALE 59%		FEMALE 41%	
Under 10:	23%	Under 10:	29%
10 - 17:	77%	10 - 17:	71%

When compared to the ONS 2020 general population figures for Croydon girls make up 48% of the population and boys 52%.

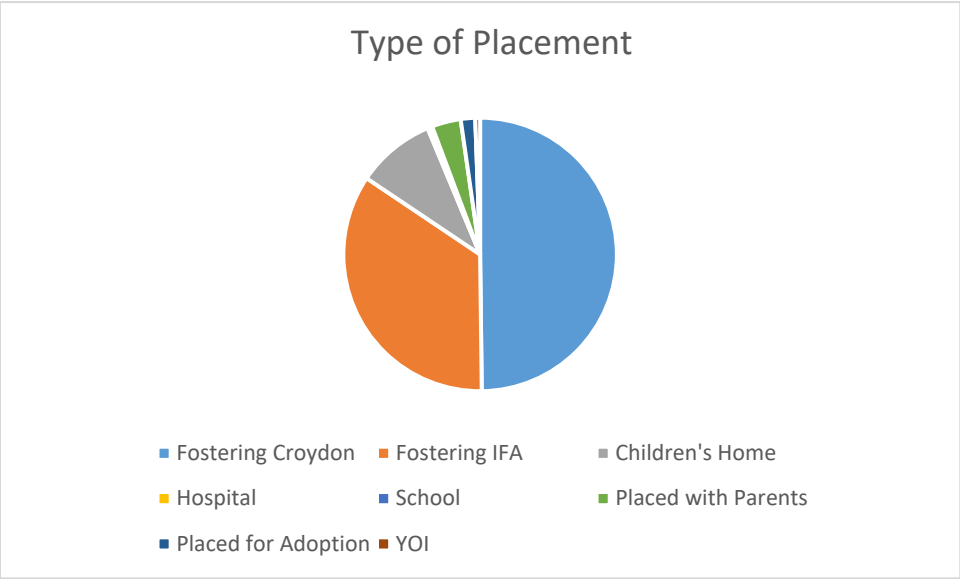
3.5. **Ethnicity:** There have been some small changes in the ethnic background of children looked after, compared to the previous year. White and White British Children have decreased overall by 4%, whilst those identifying as 'mixed' has increased by 3% and Black and Black British children have increased by 2%.

ETHNIC BACKGROUND OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER		2021	Mar 2022	Not UASC Mar 2022	UASC Mar 2022
White and White British	37%	33%	37%	20%	
Black and Black British	27%	29%	33%	12%	
Asian and Asian British	19%	18%	6%	64%	
Mixed	14%	17%	21%	0%	
Other ethnic groups	3%	3%	3%	4%	

A further analysis of this data using ethnicity classification used in the 2021 Census reveals more detail of the diversity in each of the above groups:



3.6. **Type of placement:** In March 2022, 84% of our children were placed in foster placements (compared with 74% of SNs and 71% England Average data 2020/21). Of those children living with foster carers 50% are with Croydon foster carers, which is slightly better than statistical neighbours (39%) and the England average (48%).



3.7. Children missing from care:
 124 Children Looked After had at least one recorded missing incident during 2021/22; this represents 17% of all children looked after and whilst this is lower than pre-Covid (22%) it is higher than statistical neighbours (12%). When a child is found they are offered a 'return home interview' to help ascertain the reasons why a child/young person went missing and to help prevent a future episode. The average take up of a return home interview for children looked after was 56% and is an area that requires significant improvement during 2022/23.

4. Health for Children Looked After

- 4.1. The Health Operational Group instituted in 2020/21 continues to monitor the timeliness of Health Assessments for children looked after. Although timeliness can be variable by month, as of 31st March 2022 93% of children looked after for more than 12 months had an updated Health Assessment on time.
- 4.2. The Health Operational Group is guided by the CLA Health Action Plan in its focus. Whilst Health reviews have improved, audit activity has shown that there needs to be more consistency in quality and greater timeliness for the initial health assessment.



Looked after children	2020	2021	2022
Percentage of children with health assessments on time @31st March	84%	90%	93%

- 4.3. The last two years of living through Covid has brought in to focus children and young people's physical and emotional health needs. The Clinical Therapists, based within Children's Social Care, have worked alongside Social Workers and Personal Advisers to provide consultation, direct support and developed the services knowledge and skills in working with young people's emotional wellbeing.
- 4.4 There have been a small number of children that have required a hospital admission, due to their mental health deteriorating. Alongside the impact of changes in the registration of some care/support providers work is underway to develop a range of suitable support for children following discharge.
- 4.5. Care Leavers now benefit from a 'Health Passport' which helps them to have a greater understanding of their health needs and to access information.

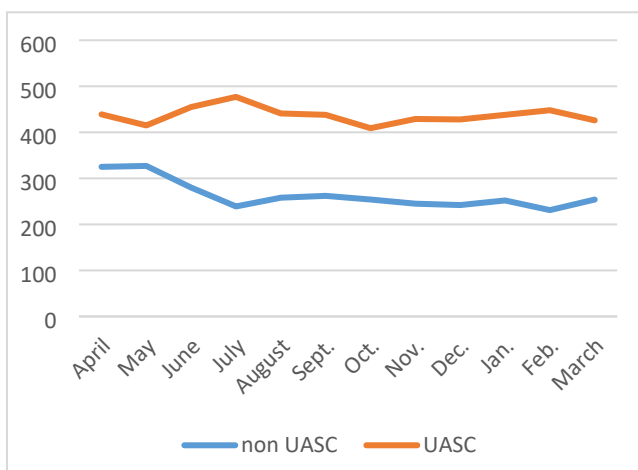


5. Care Leavers:

5.1. The Children & Social Work Act 2017 introduced a new duty on local authorities, to provide Personal Adviser (PA) support to all care leavers up to age 25, if they want this support.

Profile

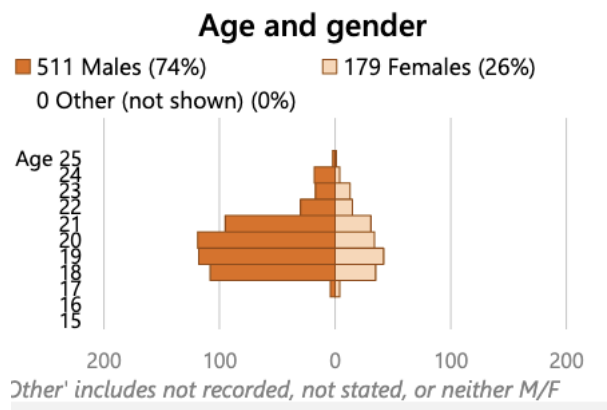
As of the 31st March 2022, there were 683 Care Experienced young people, aged 18-25, eligible for support via a pathway plan. The majority of these young people (62%) have been unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.



During 2022/23 we can expect a further 123 current children looked after to become care leavers and approximately 20 current care leavers to become 25, we can therefore expect an overall increase in the number of care leavers during 2022/23.

5.2. Age & Gender:

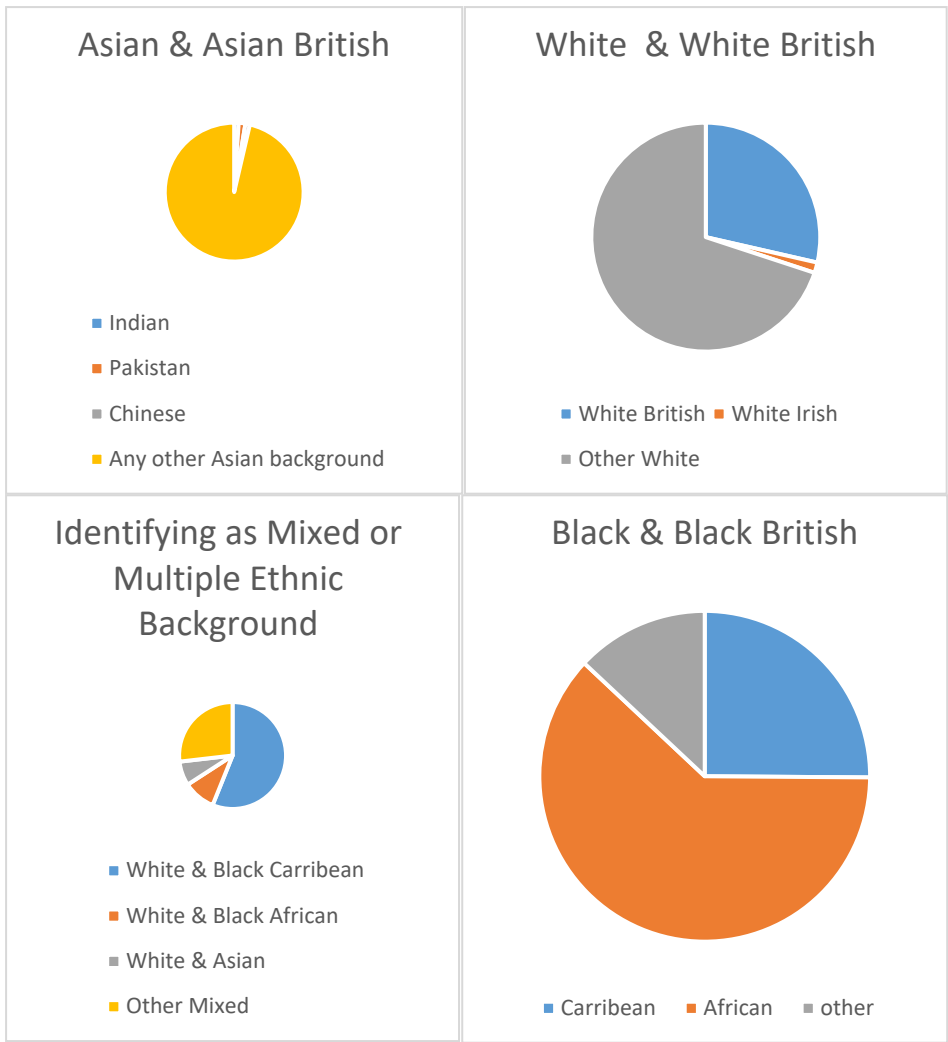
Croydon's care experienced population continues to be disproportionately identified as male. This is due to the overwhelming number of unaccompanied children seeking asylum in the UK being male. The majority of these care leavers are aged 18-21.



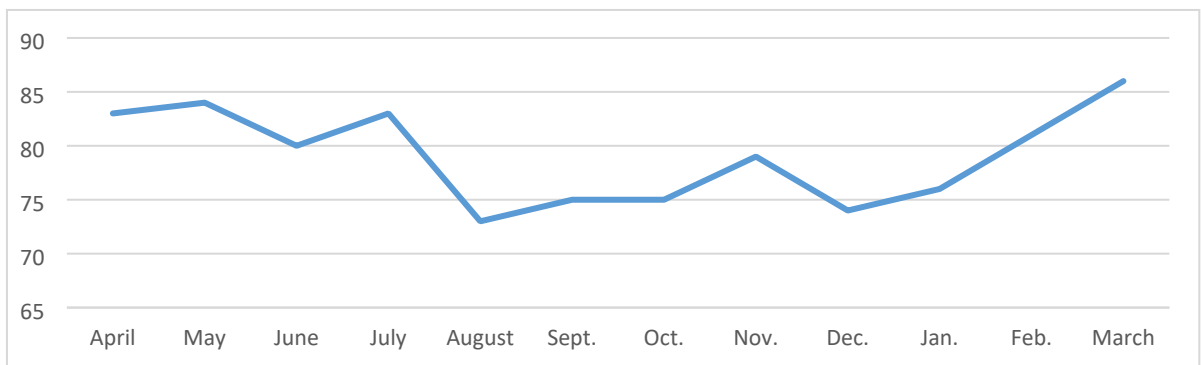
5.3. Ethnicity:

The ethnic background profile for our care experienced young people is different from that of children looked after, with more identifying as 'any other Asian background' and less as mixed. Croydon's history of looking after more unaccompanied asylum seeking children than most other local authorities is reflected in the diversity of the care leavers that we continue to support.

White and White British	30%	142 (70%) categorised as 'Other White'
Black & Black British	33%	138 (62%) categorised as 'African'
Asian and Asian British	28%	185 (96%) Categorised as 'any other Asian background'
Mixed	6%	
Other ethnic groups	3%	



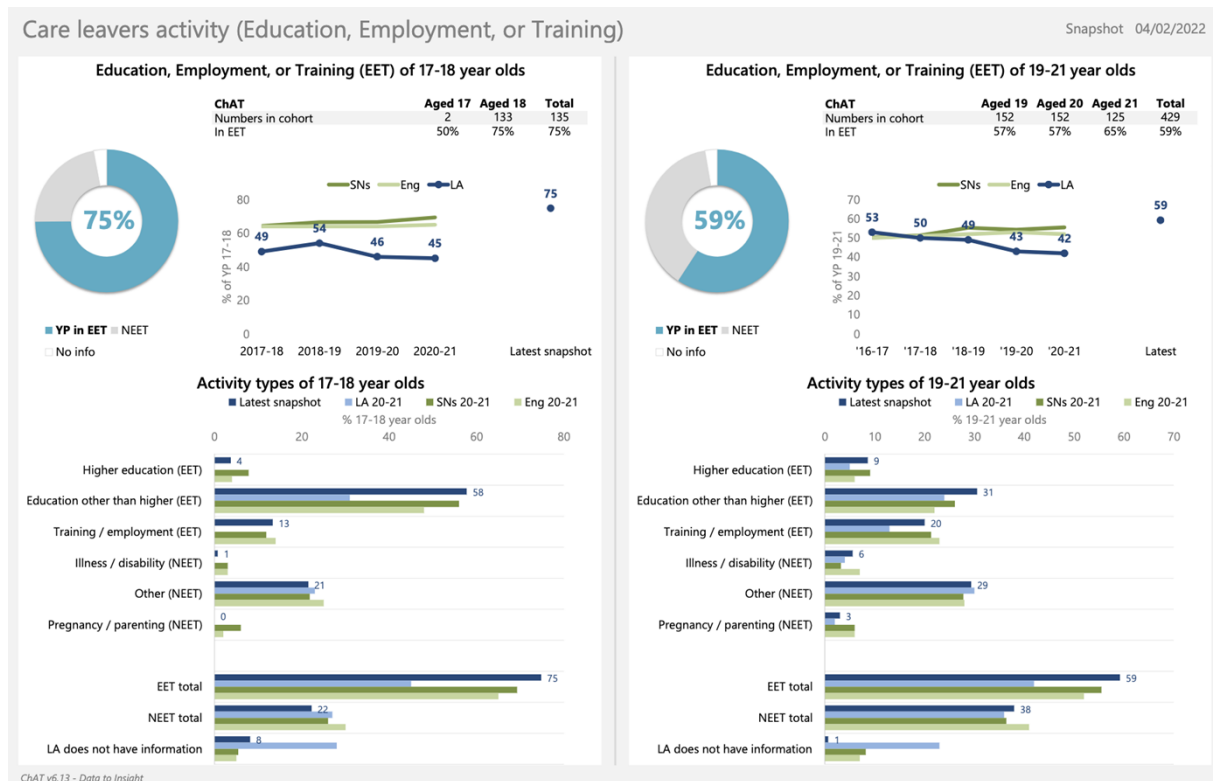
5.4. Pathway Plans:



Pathway plans are required to be updated, at least, every six months. Within Croydon our aim is to achieve this for at least 85% of young people. Performance dropped in this year, particularly as we came out of lockdown. Tighter performance monitoring arrangements are now in place and a gradual improvement can be seen.

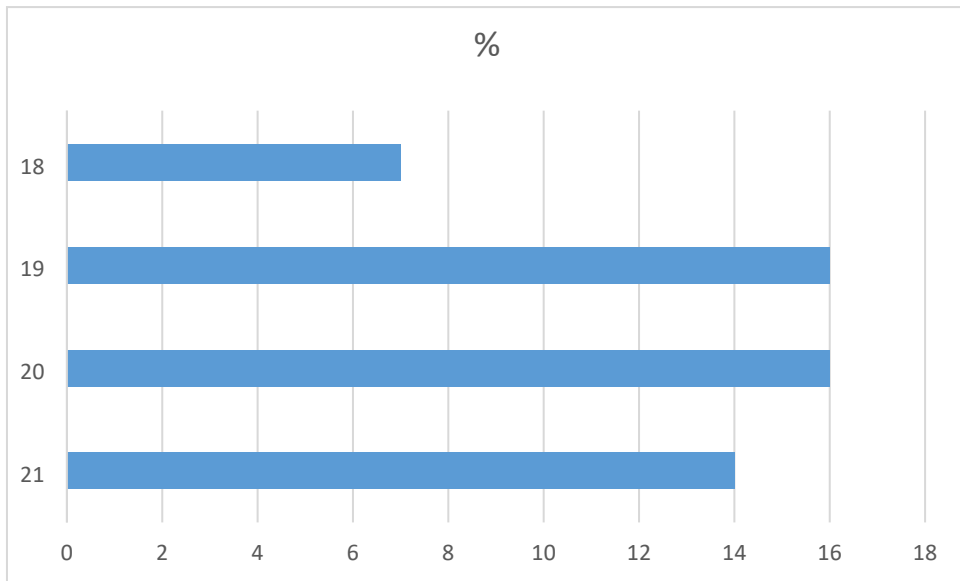
5.5. Education, Employment and Training (EET):

Education, Employment & Training



As at the end of February 2022 the percentage of care experienced young people who are in Education, Employment or Training is now comparable with local and national statistics, this is an improvement on 20/21. This still means that 40% of those aged 19-21 and nearly 25% of those aged 17-18 are not in education, employment or training. Some of these young people have unresolved immigration matters which prevents them progressing to Education, Employment or Training (38 young people- 6%).

For some young people there are other factors that can prevent them being able to access EET (e.g., Custody; Parent to under-five; immigration status). When these factors are taken in to account the % that are NEET by age are:



This is below the national average reported figures.

Some first-hand examples of the challenges and support provided to improve this vital aspect of young people's lives are provided in the quotes below:

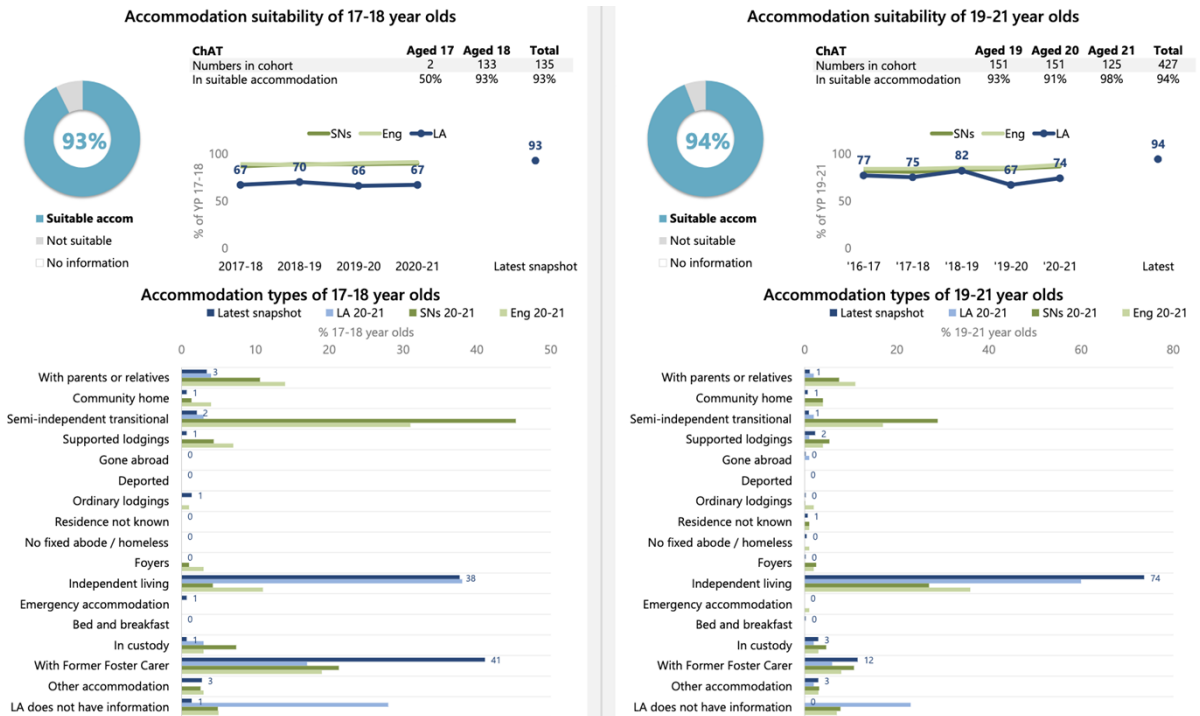
I'm really proud of what this young person has achieved... they've removed themselves from

University wasn't for them, and they have now successfully gained employment in Croydon.

Despite issues with health and housinggraduating with a

They were going to walk out after a week; however, we worked together, found alternative

Accommodation



The work to ensure that more young people can stay with their carers is something we are proud of. Independent Living is higher than other local authorities and we are working hard to ensure that for our vulnerable young people the quality of this accommodation is suitable as well. There are currently 15 priority Croydon tenancies per annum for us to make use of, we would like this to increase.

Care Experienced Focus for 2022:

- Ensure caseloads remain as low as possible to enable the best support for an increasing number of Care Experienced young people.
- Further develop peer support and a 'Care Experienced Club' to focus on the needs of young people entering work and becoming independent.
- Understand better the support needs and risks for our Care Experienced young people, particularly for our asylum-seeking population.
- Expand training opportunities and learn from young people's experiences.
- Improve the accommodation offer for young people to ensure the right help is available to enable young people to achieve independence that is not isolated and unsupported.

6. Fostering

6.1. As of March 2022, the Fostering Service supports 207 Foster Carer households and cares for 43% of our children looked after. During the year there have been 27 Fostering Assessments undertaken, with 12 new foster families approved so far. There have been 17 foster families leave Croydon for a variety of reasons.

6.2. These fostering households offer short break care, short term foster carers and long term foster carers. This include the “Connected Persons Foster Carers” who are approved to care for specific children.

6.3. The independent Fostering Reviewing Officers have continued to ensure that foster carers annual reviews have been held on time (95% on time). This allows opportunities to identify support needs for both carers and children with additional scrutiny.

6.4. The Fostering Panel considered 123 fostering arrangements during 2021/22. Membership of the Fostering Panel was refreshed , in line with national guidance, to provide a mix of new and experienced perspectives. All panel members received an appraisal during 2021. Panels have been undertaken virtually during Covid and feedback has been positive regarding how the panel functions and is experienced by attendees.

6.5. Croydon Foster Carers have continued to provide outstanding support, care and love for our children looked after and an increasing number of young people remain with their foster carers after they turn 18.



7. Adoption & Permanence

- 7.1. Croydon Council no longer operates as an Adoption Agency. Adopt London South (ALS) is our Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) and was established in July 2019. ALS is one of the four RAAs that provides adoption services across 23 London Boroughs.
- 7.2. ALS is the largest partnership involving 9 Local Authority services: **Croydon**, Kingston and Richmond operating as AFC, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark, Sutton, Merton and Wandsworth. ALS recruits and assesses new adoptive families and finds families for children in partnership with the LA's.
- 7.3. ALS also provides post adoption support to families, children and adopted adults. Services are also available for birth parents and a letterbox system enables indirect contact between birth families and children.
- 7.4. During 2020-2021, 14 Croydon children were adopted. Throughout the year there were an average of 10 children waiting to be matched with a prospective adoptive family at any point. Average time between entering care and moving in with an adoptive family, for children who were adopted (491 days) has reduced from the previous year (536) and remains better than our SN's (549).



8. Voice of children and young people in our care

- 8.1. Croydon's Children in Care Council (E.M.P.I.R.E.) has an active membership and continued to meet virtually throughout the pandemic. With the lifting of lockdown more opportunities to meet face to face have taken place. The appointment of a Young Director and apprentices is assisting in ensure that children's views are heard and valued. The group has provided invaluable feedback throughout the year. A summary from E.M.P.I.R.E is provided below:

Over the last two years, E.M.P.I.R.E'S reputation within the local voluntary and statutory sector has grown considerably, most notably through our work with high-risk young people. Alongside this, we are seen by many as a beacon of good practice in terms of our youth work, systemic practice and finding creative solutions to some of the most complex issues facing young people today.

For some young people, simply taking part in activities when emotions and feelings are not declared off-limits is very important. We have a system which allows young people to find a level of involvement that suits them. This could mean attending weekly sessions, taking part in Corporate Parenting Panel or simply attending one activity.

Overview of activities:

- **Vision Board Session** - This was a powerful session as all the young people were able to make physical vision boards to map out their goals no matter how big or small. The young people then had the opportunity to work with staff 1-1 to map out the steps that need to be put in place and the support that is required to make all their goals achievable.
- **Goal Setting Workshop** - Linking into Vision Board session as a follow up.
- **Pan London Children in Care Council** - The E.M.P.I.R.E staff and young people attend the Pan London CICC meeting along with all Children in Care Council's across London Borough of Croydon Council.
- **Online Mental Health Wellbeing Sessions**
- **Youth Hub (Weekly)** – These sessions take place every week at the Council owned Youth Centre – Samuel Coleridge Taylor Centre
- **Cookery** – We hosted 4 cookery session to support the young people build up their independent living skills
- **Accredited Money Management Course** – All children looked after and care leavers were given the opportunity to gain a level 1 qualification in Money Management
- **Pancake Day**
- **Easter Egg Hunt**
- **Go-Karting**
- **National Association of Virtual School Heads** - 3 E.M.P.I.R.E young people were selected to represent all children looked after and care leavers from the Croydon Borough. They had the opportunity to sit down at a round table with the virtual school head teachers and ask them questions on what they are doing to help improve and support young people in their schools. This was an amazing opportunity for the young people which helped them use their voice to implement change for all young people and generation coming up behind them. The young people had the privilege to openly challenge thoughts and behaviours of Virtual School Heads to give them an insight and some struggles of what various children looked after face during their time in education.
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9. Independent visiting & Mentoring & Advocacy

- 9.1. The Independent visiting service has continued to provide an independent contact for children. During 2021-2022 there was an average of 73 children and young people matched with an Independent Visitor and the service has expanded to support 21 care experienced young people as well.
- 9.2. The three Independent Visitor co-ordinators are managed by the IRO Service Manager, building on the external scrutiny and support that the roles provide.
- 9.3. Many of our children looked after and care leavers, including unaccompanied asylum seeking children access services from Bernardo's and other community Advocacy Services, which increases their social network and provides safety and support
- 9.4. Our Children access mentoring, independent visitors or community services from:
 - Independent Visitor Service
 - Learning Mentor Volunteer Scheme
 - Young Roots- Department for Education grant funded mentoring Scheme
 - Croydon Council UASC mentoring scheme (run by YP from migrant background)
 - Community Services: Red Cross, Refugee Council etc.



10. Key Achievements & Conclusion

- 10.1. 2021/22 was marked by the continuing impact of Covid and a need to adjust again to more freedoms and returning to a 'new normal'. Many of our children and young people have coped amazingly well, however for some the continued uncertainty has impacted significantly. The improved partnership working through the Health Operational Group and the in-house clinical service has helped identify and implement support quickly. We still have work to do in identifying carers that can manage the needs of children and young people coming out of hospital.
- 10.2. We have maintained statutory visiting frequencies and view this as central to providing meaningful support for children and young people. The restructure of the service is now in place and providing focussed support for younger children (under 16) and for those aged 16-25.
- 10.3. The introduction of the National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children has assisted in ensuring that Croydon does continue to look after a disproportionate number of children. Overall numbers of Looked After Children (under 18) have decreased because of this, enabling more manageable caseloads and ensuring that children make connections in the area they are going to live as soon as possible.
- 10.4. We have continued to provide a significant number of foster homes locally for our children, ensuring that they remain connected to Croydon and their community.

- 10.5. Once again, the real praise needs to go to all our children Looked After and Care Experienced Young People who have engaged with their education and further training whilst managing the uncertainty of Covid.
- 10.6. Our continued aim for 2022/23 is to ensure that we increase our local provision so that all our children looked after and care experienced young people remain Happy, Healthy and Here.