

Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2019 - 2020

be the change
for children and young people in croydon



Forward



By Councillor Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member and Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel

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 leavers. During the last year the Corporate Parenting Panel have been mindful of the Ofsted Inspection carried out in 2017 and the subsequent Improvement Plan which lead to improvements and an overall Good Ofsted rating in February 2020.

The role of 'Corporate Parent' is a collective responsibility of the Council. Many of our children looked after care leavers 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 our Participation Team, specifically EMPIRE our Children in Care Council and the feedback we receive from our children and young people through various means, play an integral part in Croydon's improvement journey. Our children and care leavers voices help us to keep focussed at ground level and influence development of services in the right way.

As corporate parents we all want the best for our children. We are proud of their achievements and create opportunities to celebrate with them. I am proud of all our young people and their achievements and it is a privilege to work with them.

As a council it's so important that we take steps to be the best corporate parent and corporate family that we can be. I am committed to doing everything I can to support children and care leavers so that they can benefit from the many opportunities our borough has to offer.

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 2019-2020 and is a celebration of the success and achievements of both our staff, children and young people.

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 2019/2020.
- 1.2. There is a statutory requirement to provide information on a number of areas that relate to the improvement of outcomes for Children looked after and care leavers. Croydon is committed to ensuring all our children and young people are given every opportunity to experience good care and achieve their potential. As corporate parents we are taking steps to ensure that our children are provided with a wide range of services in order to support their individual needs and help them grow up feeling supported and with a sense of belonging.
- 1.3. As corporate parents we need to understand our strengths, our areas of challenge, and take actions to address any identified improvements. Overall 2019-2020 remained a challenging year for us as corporate parents as we have continued our journey of improvement that started following an inadequate Ofsted rating in 2017.
- 1.4. During 2019-2020 our efforts focused on :
 - Updating our Croydon placement sufficiency strategy and working on increasing the range and options of accommodation available for our children and care leavers
 - Working towards improving the health of children looked after
 - Increasing our children access and support to remain in educational employment and training (EET)
 - Reviewing Children Social care performance to improve care planning for our children
 - Improving our children placements stability and permanence planning
 - Increasing practical and financial support to our foster carers, including staying put rates
 - Improving compliance with statutory requirements and good practice
 - Improve our direct work with children and workforce stability

- 1.5. In February 2020, our services to CLA and Care Leavers have been the subject to an Ofsted ILACS, our work was rated as requiring improvement to be good with the overall work of the Children Social Care being rated as Good.



2. Corporate Parenting Panel

- 2.1. The statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services (in Croydon this is the Executive Director, Children, Families and Education) 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.
- 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 Young People Leaving Care, including Management Information and Performance Indicators monitoring all aspects of Children in Care. The data details the following:

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

2.5. Corporate Parenting panel has also considered a number of detailed reports and topics:

- Educational progress of children looked after
- Health outcomes of children looked after
- Fostering annual report and placement stability
- Voice of the child and care leaver / participation
- Looked After Child placement sufficiency
- Adoption and permanence information
- Independent Reviewing Service, impact and outcomes
- Local offer and pledge for our Care Leavers

2.6. Our priorities for 2020-2021 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:

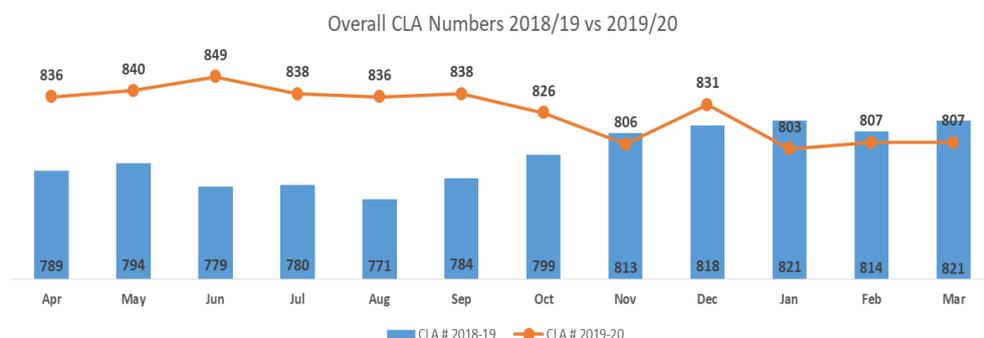
- **Accommodation & Support:** Increase accommodation range for our children and Care Leavers so that they have a choice of placement and as

a result experience placement and emotional stability and good care. In order to achieve this we continue to focus on our recruitment activity for Croydon Foster Carers and refresh our Commissioning Framework. We are working in a more proactive way with all partners and our clinical team to match children early to increase support in placements and promote stability.

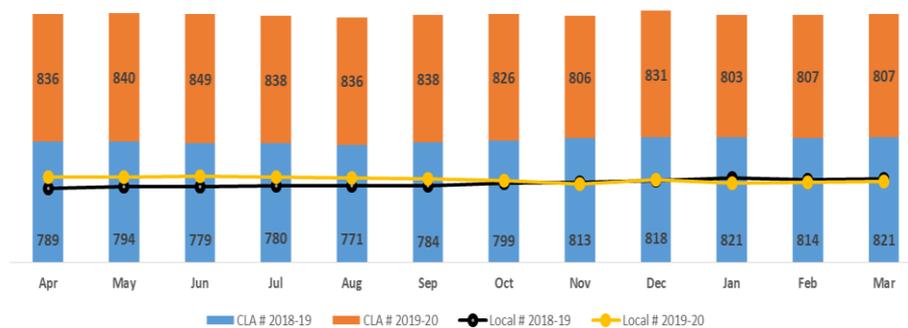
- **Health & Wellbeing:** Improve our children and care leavers' emotional wellbeing. We are focusing on the take up of Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ) with Children Looked After and how this is used in our Health Assessments so Young People are supported not only with their physical but emotional needs early ,in a systemic way. We are making better use of our Systemic Clinicians to support our direct work with children, carers and families. We have additional emotional support workers who provide services to our children and Care Leavers.
- **Transitions & care and pathway planning:** Improve preparation for independence for Care Leavers and reduce the number of children and young people who experience poor outcome. Our focus has been on proactive care and Pathway planning that identifies clear routes and objectives to transition from dependent to independent lives. We would like to see clear ways for our Care leavers to access a housing pathway that will meet their need. We have updated our "local offer" and are working on updating our "staying put" policy.
- **Engaging in education or training:** Improving our support and offer for care leavers so we can increase our young people who are continuing to learn or engage in work. We are working with Virtual School and Youth engagement team to promote learning and work opportunities for our care leavers to reduce the number of children who are not in education, training or employment.

3. Children looked after: Demographics, health and education

3.1. Overall there has been a slight decrease in the total numbers of Children looked after (CLA) in Croydon since April 2019. This is in part a reflection of the investment in our early help and families services but also due to increase in the quality of our services as noted by Ofsted.

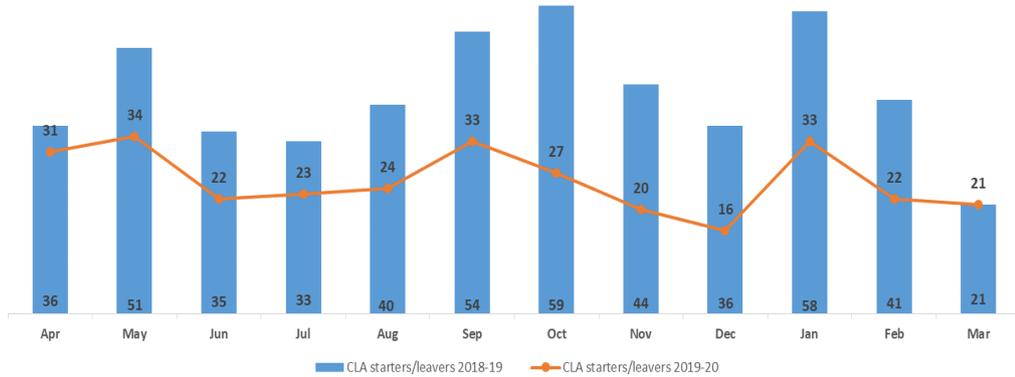


3.2. There has been a slight change in the proportion of local CLA compared to UASC. In April 2019 there were 558 Children Looked after recorded as “local” children and 279 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). By March 2020 the number of UASC remained static with same number of children being in our care and a slight reduction in the number of local children.



3.3. Between April 2019 and March 2020 the average number of children coming into Croydon Council’s care each month has reduced from the previous year.

CLA Starters/Leavers 2018/19 vs 2019/20



3.4. In April 2019, Croydon had 88.8 Children Looked After per 10,000 population, this reduced to 85 per 10,000 by end of March 2020. This is significantly above the average of 65 per 10,000 nationally and 53.7 per 10,000 for London and makes Croydon an outlier amongst our statistical neighbours. After excluding UASC, Croydon had 55.8 Children Looked After per 10,000 population at the end of March 2020, a position relative to its statistical neighbours but still above London averages.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Croydon	87.00	83.00	81.00	86.00	85.00
Statistical Neighbours	56.30	54.20	54.60	53.70	
England	60.00	62.00	64.00	65.00	

3.5. **Age & Gender:** The majority of our CLA are between 10-17 years old. 65% of our children in care are male, 30% of which are UASC, 35% of our children are female and only 5% are UASC.

AGE AT 31 MARCH 2020			
MALE		FEMALE	
Under 10:	17.7%	Under 10:	28.6%
10 - 17:	82.3%	10 - 17:	71.4%

3.6. **Ethnicity:** We are looking after a wide range of children from a diverse cultural and ethnic background. 38% of our children are recorded as White, 26% are

recorded as Black or Black British, 19% are recorded as Asian or Asian British and the rest are recorded as mixed or other ethnic group.

ETHNIC ORIGIN OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AT 31 MARCH 2020	
White British and White Other	38%
Mixed	14%
Asian or Asian British	19%
Black or Black British	26%
Other ethnic groups	3%

3.7. **Type of placement:** In March 2020, 84% of our children were placed in Foster placements (compared with 72% of SNs and England Average data 2018/19). This is a slight improvement from last year and over 56% being placed with in-house foster carers. This is above the SNs 37% and England 50% rates for 2018/2019. Only 4% were in a Residential provision and just 7% in an unregulated semi-supported provision. The rest of our children were placed with prospective adopters or living with parents.

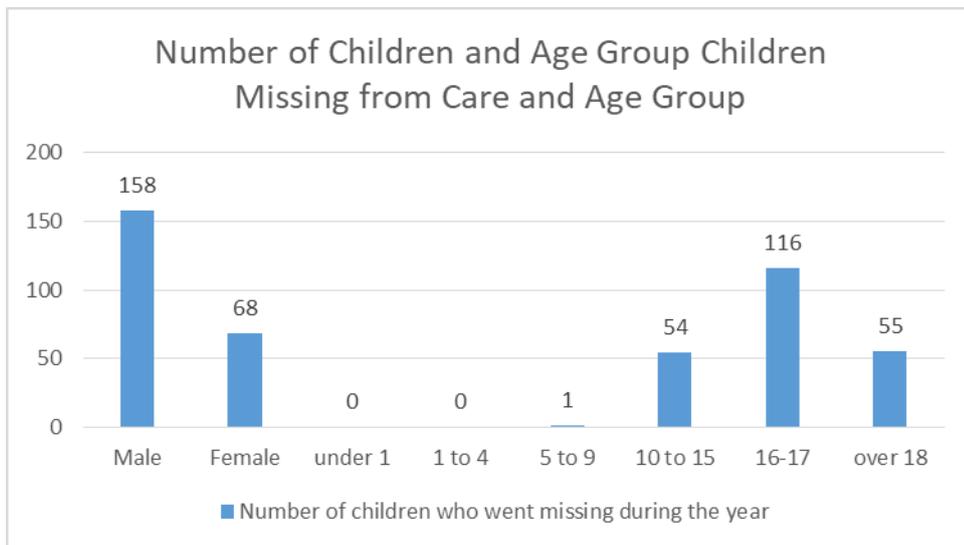
3.8. **Reasons for coming into care:** Local children looked after (CLA) are in care as a result of “Abuse and Neglect”, whilst our UASC enter care due to “absent parent”.

CLA START 2019-2020

Category of Need	%
N1 - Abuse or Neglect	42%
N2 - Child's Disability	1%
N3 - Parental Illness or Disability	1%
N4 - Family in Acute Stress	4%
N5 - Family Dysfunction	9%
N6 - Socially Unacceptable Behaviour	1%
N8 - Absent Parenting	43%
Grand Total	100%

3.9. **Children missing from care:** Children looked after are more likely to go missing than any other children we are involved with as a council. On average, 82% of all missing children are looked after. When found in average 96% of children are offered a return home interview and 63% of children and young

people participate in conversations about the reasons why they go missing and complete this interview with an independent person. Children at risk of exploitation benefit from effective multi-agency information sharing. Action plans developed through the multi-agency complex adolescent's panel are increasingly comprehensive and well targeted. Risk assessments are not yet consistently used and the quality of subsequent action plans to reduce risk to children is variable. Well-targeted work to identify adults who may present a risk to children leads to successful disruption activity. There has been a slight increase from last year (20%) number of children going missing from care (22%).



3.10. **Involvement with Youth Offending Service:** Our children in care remain overrepresented in the criminal justice system, however figures are in line with our statistical neighbours.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	
Croydon	6.00	6.00	6.00	5.00	5.00	0.00
Outer London	6.00	5.00	4.00	3.00		-1.00
Statistical Neighbours	7.25	6.00	5.43	6.00		0.57
England 970	5.00	4.00	4.00	3.00		-1.00

4. Health for Children Looked After

- 4.1. In 2019-2020, we have continued to face challenges in achieving our targets in terms of delivering timely initial health assessments for our children looked after, albeit a slight improvement has been noted. An action plan was regularly reviewed and performance challenged at the bi monthly, multi- agency Children Health Strategic Board and monthly Operational Groups that is focused on promoting timely health interventions.
- 4.2. Processes have been updated in order to improve efficiency in planning and referring children who enter care for Initial Health Assessments and our Health partners have further put in place strategies to improve quality assurance. Health Champions are now in place in all services to promote better practice in relation to health outcomes.
- 4.3. Work has taken place in terms of developing a “Health passport” for our care Leavers and although the implementation was delayed due to COVID, but it is now in operation.
- 4.4. **The graph** below outlines year performance on a number of key health indicators :



Looked after children	2020
Percentage of children with health assessment @31st March	84%
Percentage of children with development assessment @31st March	83%
Percentage of children with immunisations @31st March	71%
Percentage of children with dental checks	72%

5. Education of children looked after

- 5.1. **Schools:** In the academic year Sept 2019- July 2020, the Virtual School worked with 676 children and young people who were in care (CLA) continually for the whole 12 months (including eligible and relevant Care Leavers.) Virtual school works on behalf of all children and young people of 'educational age' which means ages 3-18 in school years, nursery to year 13. This is 60 more CLA who were in care long term, than in the same period last year suggesting more placements are now lasting longer and stability has increased.
- 5.2. During 2019-2020 a total of 51% of children and young people attended schools in borough and 49% were placed in schools out of borough.
- 5.3. **Special educational needs and disabilities:** 29% of the CLA cohort between 3 and 18 years old were recorded as having SEND needs in the academic year 2019/2020. Of these, 14% had an EHCP and 15% were classified by schools as receiving SEND support.
- 5.4. Of the total number of children looked after at the end of the academic year, 69 (8%) attended special schools, a drop on 13% last year.
- 5.5. At the end of 2019/20, 90% of statutory school age CLA attended schools rated by Ofsted as 'Outstanding' or 'Good'. Compared to 80.1% the previous year.
- 5.6. Virtual School continued to work with Croydon town school-CTS (11-16) and Croydon Town College-CTC (16-25) as our interim provisions for newly arrived young people. The provisions offer a full curriculum complement and intensive ESOL as well as school readiness and preparation for understanding how schools and education in the UK work. There are 20 places at CTS and the school was full throughout the 19-20 with a waiting list. The college had 6 places in 19-20.

Educational Attainment at the end of 2020 academic year

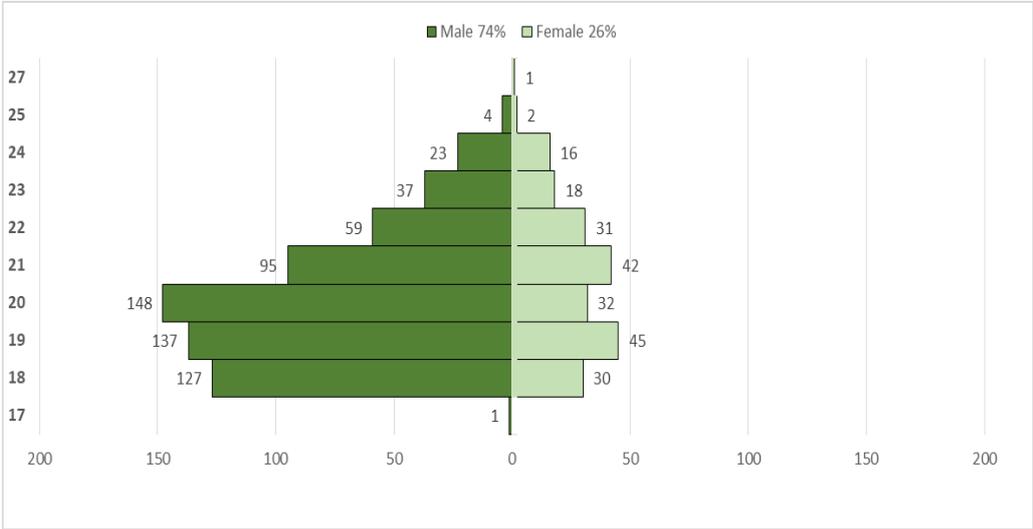
- 5.7. 2019/2020 Academic Year was an unusual year with Covid19 happening nearly half way through that changed the way our children were able to access education. The Virtual School report presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel in September 2020 provides a detailed account of our children progress and challenges.

- 5.8. Our Virtual School noted that formal grades were not submitted to examination boards by schools for EYFS, Year 1 pupils or KS1 pupils. Therefore data about our children progress will all be collated and analysed internally over the autumn term by the Virtual School and an updated data report will be presented to the Corporate Parenting panel. Some of the data submitted is hard to compare to previous years, however we are very proud of our children achievements and not least thankful to the support their carers provided to continue their learning.
- 5.9. **Personal educational plans (PEPs):** Percentage of CLA at SSA (Statutory School Age) with a Personal Education Plan (PEP) reviewed & completed on a 6 monthly basis has continued to improve during 2019/2020. The average completion and review within timescale rate was over the 85% target throughout the year. Our Virtual School designated teachers and Virtual Head teacher have been working to improve our children in care access to learning and support progress.
- 5.10. **Exclusions:** There were 2 permanent exclusions of (Secondary) Croydon CLA during the 2019/20 academic year, which is an increase on the previous year's figure of 0. There were no permanent exclusions of primary age pupils. Each of these cases were an extreme incidence of behaviour that was unable to be mitigated despite intense collaboration and involvement of the VS with the school.

6. Care Leavers: Demographic profile, health and education

- 6.1. 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.
- 6.2. The duty commenced from 1 April 2018.
- 6.3. As of March 2019, there were 779 young adults in Croydon's care leaver population, which has seen a steady increase over the last year. By March 2020 there were 848 young people supported by our Leaving Care Service.

6.4. **Age and Gender:** 74% of our carer leavers are male and 26 % are females. The majority of our care leavers are between 18-21 years of age but our number of young people aged 22-25 who continue to receive support has increased during the year.



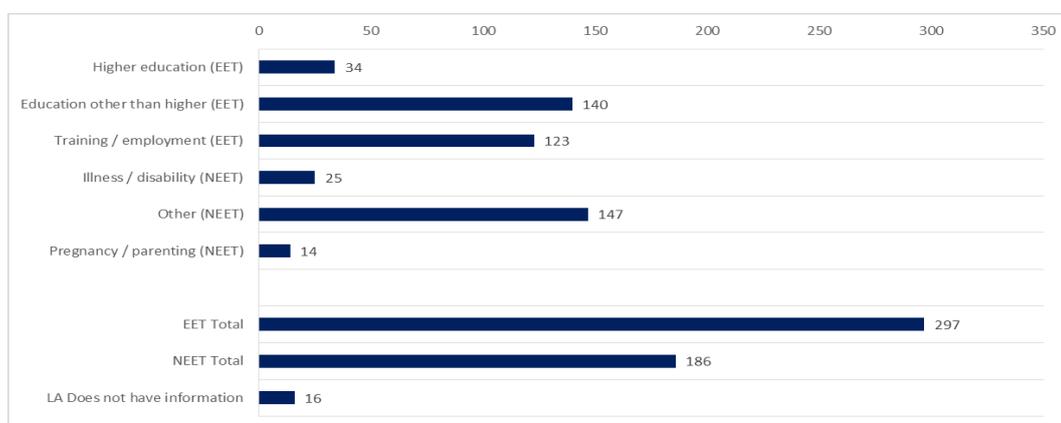
6.5. **Ethnicity:** In terms of ethnicity, 33% of our care leavers are recorded as Black or Black British, 31% as White British or White Others, 25% recorded as Asian or Asian British, 8% are recorded as other ethnic group and 4% are recorded as mixed heritage.

Ethnic background	
White	31%
Mixed	4%
Asian or Asian British	25%
Black or black British	33%
Other ethnic group	8%

6.6. **Pathway planning:** All our care leavers should have pathway plans which details how we work together to support them in all aspects of their lives .Our performance in terms of completing the plans has increased slightly in 2019/2020 and 84% of care leavers have had up to date plans. However, we are aware that the quality of our planning and how we have engaged care leavers in building their own plans has not been as good as required. We introduced a new pathway plan format that is helping to reflect young people’s views and strengthen planning. Implementation of this new approach is

incremental, targeting those who have been assessed as having greater vulnerability, but it is still in its early stages and senior managers are aware that they need to accelerate the pace of recent developments.

6.7. **Education, Employment and Training (EET):** Of Croydon’s care leaver population aged 19-21, an average of 60% were in either full time or part time EET during 2019/2020. This is an area of concern for us as the figures are slightly lower than the national average, however our performance has improved from previous year (49%) and is the best recorded performance for the last 5 years.



6.8. **Placement stability and accommodation:** The vast majority of Croydon’s care leavers are living in accommodation classed as Independent Living, predominantly Private Tenancies and Landlord Bond Schemes. A small number (38 in March 2020) were living with their former foster carers (“staying put”), a figure that has been broadly lower than England average.

6.9. Our records indicate that from our 18-21 care leaver’s cohort an average of 93% were recorded to be in suitable accommodation, however we know that young people are not always happy with where they live and this is further aggravated after the 21st birthday when their entitlements change and choice of accommodation might reduce further.

6.10. Through DFE funding two homeless prevention workers based with gateway Links supported our care leavers throughout 2019/2020 in many areas related to accommodation needs. We supported our care leavers so they did not become homeless.



7. Health for care leavers

- 7.1. In 2019-2020, we have continued to face challenges in achieving our targets in terms of delivering timely health assessments for our children looked after, it would be fair to assume that as a result young people transition into adulthood might not have had a full understanding of their health needs.

- 7.2. Our care leavers receive their “health histories” in form of a letter from our commissioned health providers, but due to Data Protection these have not been shared with Social care, therefore we do not record how many young people have received and kept these for their future. Work has taken place in terms of developing a “health passport” for our care leavers and although the implementation was delayed due to COVID the health passport is has been implemented from September 2020. It was further agreed that with consent from our young people a copy of their health passport will be kept in the CRS record for future reference and also to track that they receive these.

- 7.3. Emotional health for our care leavers has been an area of ongoing concern as a large number of children and care leavers have additional emotional needs resulting from their early life experiences as well as how they experienced the care system.

- 7.4. Throughout 2019/2020 the following emotional wellbeing services were available to our staff or young people (some newly developed) :
- Consultations with CAMHS for staff in order to support CLA and Care Leavers
 - Support from CAMHS 1:1 work with young people
 - Our Systemic lead has designed a training programme around the “tree of life narrative” approach that will support social work practice with our children and care leavers
 - Consultations with Systemic Clinical Lead to support work with CLA and Care Leavers
 - A drop in service from local emotional health support service for young people who may not engage with traditional clinic services has started but has temporary stopped due to COVID
 - 3 Emotional Health workers were appointed through DFE funding to support unaccompanied asylum seeking children and adults
 - Off the Record – continue to provide valuable emotional support to our young care leavers

8. Fostering

- 8.1. As of March 2020, Croydon Fostering Service has continued its work with CORAM to promote the recruitment of foster carers. Our priority is particularly in finding homes for older children, sibling groups, children with disabilities and long-term placements.



- 8.2. The Corporate parenting panel would be aware that since November 2018, Croydon's Council and CORAM have been partners in the recruitment of foster carers and targets for 2019/20 were set out in the Sufficiency Strategy and within the Recruitment and Retention strategy, but those have not led to increase in our foster carers numbers. This partnership comes to an end in October 2020.

- 8.3. As of March 2020 the Fostering Service had a total of 235 approved fostering households that offer respite 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. At the end of the year, 378 children looked after were placed with Croydon approved Foster carers.
- 8.4. In 2019, a full review of the fostering service created an opportunity to identify the gaps in practices, and put in place an extensive programme of improvement that led to a significant improvement in compliance with National Minimum Standards for Fostering (MNS).
- 8.5. The introduction of the two Fostering Reviewing Officers has meant that the carers’ reviews are chaired by an independent person, not the allocated Supervising Social Worker. This allows opportunities to identify both support needs for carer and children in their care and consider how suitable Foster carers remain to foster for Croydon. This process added a layer of quality assurance and timeliness to the carer’s annual reviews. For example, in terms for the Foster Carers Annual Reviews completion in timescales performance was 97% for the year.
- 8.6. The Fostering Panel was reviewed in 2019 and a new Panel Chair was appointed and took his role in April 2020. Further work to expand on panel membership and central list was also completed to increase diversity, skills and knowledge.
- 8.7. There has been extensive consultation with Foster carers on different aspects of the service practices including terms of the financial package, and the new Financial Policy which was implemented from 31 January 2020.
- 8.8. The service has broaden the training programme offer to Foster carers albeit this had to be re-adjusted due to COVID to online training.
- 8.9. Our Fostering service, is making progress but we are continuing to work on our partnership with CFCA and provide high support and high challenge to our carers in order to see our children growing and developing into confident adults.

- 8.10. We are very proud of our Foster carers, some of which contributed to a number of events and activities to promote fostering for Croydon and talked about their passion and commitment to fostering. Our Foster carers are providing good homes for our children, we are thankful and value their commitment and care they give to our children.



9. Adoption & Permanence

- 9.1. 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 (with staff TUPE completed by September 2019) as part of the wider Adopt London RAA partnership. ALS is one of the four RAAs that provides adoption services across 23 London Boroughs.
- 9.2. 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.
- 9.3. ALS is a shared service hosted by Southwark Council and managed through a robust partnership agreement and management board. Croydon is part of the board.
- 9.4. 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.

- 9.5. In 2019-2020, 11 Croydon children were adopted. An average of 17 children were waiting to be matched with a prospective adoptive family. Average time between entering care and moving in with an adoptive family, for children who were adopted (553 days) has reduced from the previous year(651) but is still slightly above our SN's(549) and England average (486). Our number of children waiting for a match has reduced significantly and we are continuing our work to improve the timeliness our achieving permanence.
- 9.6. During the year a further 14 children left our carer after the court granted a Special Guardianship Order to their carer, family members and/or friends.
- 9.7. ALS reported a 6% increase in the number of prospective adopters recruited but noted that this has not met their target set for year one but this is improving in year two.
- 9.8. Post Adoption Support has been a significant challenge due to Croydon transferring 116 cases, compared to 28 from all the other 8 boroughs, Croydon agreed to fund this work for a year. A sessional worker has resolved 56 cases, but there are 50 of these cases still waiting, mostly over a year already. This work will be completed this year.



10. Voice of children and young people in our care

- 10.1. In December 2019, Rees Centre University of Oxford and Coram Voice undertook the Bright Spots survey: Your Life, Your Care: a survey of the views of looked after children and young people aged 4-18yrs in Croydon. 316 children in care responded to the survey. This accounts for 41% of our children in care population.

- 10.2. Children aged between 4-11yrs were positive about their care and their relationships with their social workers and carers. Virtually all reported they were fine.
- 10.3. The majority (84%) of children aged 8-18yrs in Croydon felt that their lives were improving: a similar proportion as children and young people in other LAs.
- 10.4. However a number of older children and young people (11-18yrs) who gave negative responses felt uncared for and ignored. Young people felt that carer relationships were poor and they were unable to talk to carers about things that mattered to them, and/or thought their carers did not notice how they were feeling.
- 10.5. 79% of the children who responded live with foster carers, 7% live with family and friends, the rest of children and young people live in residential, supported or semi-supported accommodation.
- 10.6. Some of our children reported that they had too many changes of placements and did not have good friends (12%).
- 10.7. 96% of children aged 8-11yrs; and 69% of young people (11-18yrs) trusted their social worker in comparison with 88% in other LAs. In comparison with other LAs, levels of trust in social workers were very similar in the younger age groups but much lower in the older 11-18yrs age group. This might be due to the changes of Social Worker as 70% of YP reported having had 2 or more Social Worker in the last 12 months.
- 10.8. There was a larger proportion (16%) of young people in Croydon who felt their carers were uninterested in their education compared to young people in other LAs and compared to their peers in the general population. 82% of young people answered that they were taught independence skills 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes' but 18% reported this was 'hardly ever' or 'never' true. Nearly one in five felt they were not being given life skills and prepared for independence.

- 10.9. Children and Young people were asked how they feel about their future- 57% were positive about their future, 26% were moderately positive about their future whilst 17% had low scores and did not feel positive about their future.
- 10.10. Since this survey we started work with our staff to further consider our work with children and training is to be provided.
- 10.11. We have recruited a Young Director, Assistant Director and other Apprentices, who are all Care Leavers and we hope to use their support and expertise to improve training and support to carers.



11. Independent visiting & Mentoring & Advocacy

- 11.1. The Independent Visiting service continues to be a great success and a Coordinator and two other staff members are recruiting and supporting volunteers in their work with children in care.
- 11.2. We have a large cohort of children who have little or no access to family and friends and our Independent Visiting Service plays an important role in providing an additional outlet for our children in care.
- 11.3. Many of our children looked after and care leavers, including unaccompanied minors access services from Bernardo's and other community Advocacy Services, which increases their social network and provides safety and support

11.4. 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.

12. Overall progress of our Children Looked after and Care Leavers and Corporate parenting functions noted by Ofsted Inspectors

12.1. In February 2020, Ofsted completed an ILACS inspection of children's social care services in London Borough of Croydon.

12.2. The Ofsted Report noted that *“Children’s services in Croydon have improved dramatically since the last inspection in 2017, when they were judged to be inadequate. Services for children and their families have been transformed as a result of strong corporate and political support, substantial investment, and the appointment of highly experienced senior managers. The current executive director for children, families and education and the director of early help and children’s social care were appointed towards the end of 2018. Building on the changes that had already been made, they quickly grasped the full extent of the improvements that were required, and they have systematically and effectively tackled the weaknesses”*.

12.3. The Ofsted inspection noted that the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers still *“requires improvement to be good”*.

12.4. The areas of improvement identified have been :

- *“The quality of written plans for children in care and care leavers.*
- *Services for care leavers, particularly the range of suitable accommodation, responses to emotional health needs and preparation for independence*
- *Placement sufficiency for children in care, and accommodation for care leavers.”*

- 12.5. Ofsted noted that *“Social workers across our practice system work hard to enable children to remain in the care of their families whenever in safe to do so”*. Ofsted noted the positive work of our Systemic Clinical team that supported our work with families and an established Edge of care team in providing additional support to families to avoid the need for children becoming looked after.
- 12.6. Ofsted also noted *“When it is not possible or appropriate for children and young people to remain at home decisive action is taken and children are accommodated timely. Such decisions are made after detailed assessments and made by a care panel which is chaired by a senior manager, to ensure sound and consistent decision-making”*.
- 12.7. We are aware that once children enter our care they benefit by having good stable placements and positive relationships with their Social Worker. Historically the effectiveness of our work with children looked after has been undermined by the high turnover of staff and the frequent changes of social workers. This longstanding legacy continues to have an impact for children in care. Some children are reluctant to engage meaningfully with a new worker as they feel that the worker will move on quickly.
- 12.8. In 2019/2020 our focus has been on recruiting permanent Social Workers with a passion of working and supporting children looked after and we hope to retain more stable workforce that will have a more positive impact on our children's lives. Ofsted has also *“The majority of workers know the children well and are focused on building meaningful relationships. Children are now seen regularly, and records of visits increasingly outline a purpose and focus on key aspects of the care plan. Careful consideration is given to the diverse needs of all children and young people, and this is embedded in day-to-day practice. Social workers are skilled in direct work and in engagement with children.”*
- 12.9. Our Children Looked after benefit from regular reviews, and letters to children from IROs are increasingly child-focused and written in sensitive, child-friendly language. This is a new development and we are working to support more young people to participate in the reviews in a more meaningful way. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO's) are now monitoring better planning and

overall a significant improvement was made in relation to children having an up to date review , The average performance was 92% . This is an area of ongoing improvement.

- 12.10. Ofsted noted that *“Foster carers are provided with a good learning and development offer, and they are positive about the support that they receive. Senior managers have made improvements to the fostering service and are currently working with an external organisation to increase foster carer*



13. Key achievements

- 13.1. Reduced the number of children who experience changes of Social Workers but this remains an area of priority for us
- 13.2. Increased performance in all areas of practice with particular focus of relational working and supporting children and young people to develop better relationship with their Social Workers, however this is an area we are not where we would like to be
- 13.3. Our children are placed close to home which means in most cases we can continue to support them to remain in their communities and keep positives links with their birth family, when is safe to do so

- 13.4. Our UASC and their Foster Carers have had additional support (through Controlled Migration Fund) and 8 Foster carer were trained to deliver specific training to all our Foster carers in relation to complexities of looking after migrant children. Over 60 Foster carers have now attended this training that is ongoing
- 13.5. Our partnerships with the Home Office and LAPS meant that other London Boroughs continued to support us with the Transfer processes for new UASC
- 13.6. Our Unaccompanied Minors arriving in the UK have had timely access to education /learning opportunities
- 13.7. Since April 2019 there is careful consideration for all new children entering through the Care Panel chaired by the Director and there is increase focused on increasing families resilience in accordance with the principles of the Children's Act 1989 is that the best place for children is within their family, network and community.
- 13.8. Our vulnerable children in care who are at risk of abuse and exploitation and reviewed regular via our Complex Adolescent panel or MACE

14. Conclusion

- 14.1. As Corporate parents we have made a significant amount of progress in 2019/2020 towards making our children experiences of care better, but we also know that we can improve our services further.
- 14.2. All our Corporate Parenting services welcome visits and feedback from elected members and ask for their ongoing support for our children and young people. Whether this is through sharing in the children's achievements at our celebration events such as the VS award ceremonies or through more formal training events
- 14.3. Members and all Council staff are essential in being champions for our children and young people in care, to ensure their voice is heard. We also ask our elected members to promote the recruitment of foster carers for our Fostering

service and assist our vision to have more good families, to care for our children and young people.

- 14.4. Whilst we acknowledge there is a way to go before we can report that our children are all happy in our care, we also have to acknowledge the huge steps made as already noted by Ofsted and would want to say thank you to all staff, partner agencies and elected members who have contributed over the last year, in supporting Corporate Parenting to make a difference to the lives of the children and young people in our care.