

# Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2020 - 2021

**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 impact of Covid 19 and the issuing of the s114 notice by the London Borough of Croydon.

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 2020-2021 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 2020/2021. This was an unprecedented year in terms of the challenges for children looked after and care leavers due to Covid19 and the restrictions on society as a whole. Many children and young people experienced loss within their families and networks and the usual routines and safety networks were significantly limited.
- 1.2. Within Croydon face to face visits to children that are looked after and care leavers was disrupted. Croydon operated virtual visits throughout the year, interspersed with face to face visits when lockdown conditions allowed. From January 2021 alternate virtual and face to face visits have taken place.
- 1.3. The 2020 financial crisis within Croydon, resulting in the issuing of a S114 notice also impacted upon service delivery with a tightening of financial controls. This did impact on the payment of some providers and also recognised some areas where budgets were not at the correct level for demand in Croydon
- 1.4. As corporate parents we need to understand our strengths, our areas of challenge, and take actions to address any identified improvements. Ofsted graded children's services as Good overall in February 2020, Children Looked After and Care leavers received a grading of requires improvement. Significant work has been undertaken, within the challenging Covid19 and S114 environments to improve the level of service further for children that are looked after.
- 1.5. During 2020-2021 our efforts focused on:
  - 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
  - Improving compliance with statutory requirements and good practice



## **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;
- 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 2021-2022 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:

- **Right to a family life**

Throughout 2020/21 there was a renewed effort to ensure that only children who need to be looked after enter the care system. Through improved work with families the number of children requiring care has reduced and a number of children have returned to their families with support.

Where children do need to become looked after the provision of care within a family environment is our priority, considering wider family and friends before placing a child with foster carers.

During 2021/22 commissioning suitable accommodation that is able to meet children's care needs and recruiting foster carers (30 for Croydon campaign) is a priority.

- **Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children**

Due to the location of Lunar House in Croydon we have always provided care and support for this most vulnerable group of children and young people. The expertise that has developed has been recognised by the home office and we are seconding a small expert team to help ensure practice develops for all UASC. We will continue to work hard to ensure that all UASC receive the care they need, whether in Croydon or through transfer to another local authority.

- **Health & Wellbeing:**

During 2020/21 the skills of the embedded systemic practitioners will be utilised across teams, enabling more direct work with families and enabling a 'Trauma Informed' approach to work, recognising the impact that Covid19 has had on many of our children and young people.

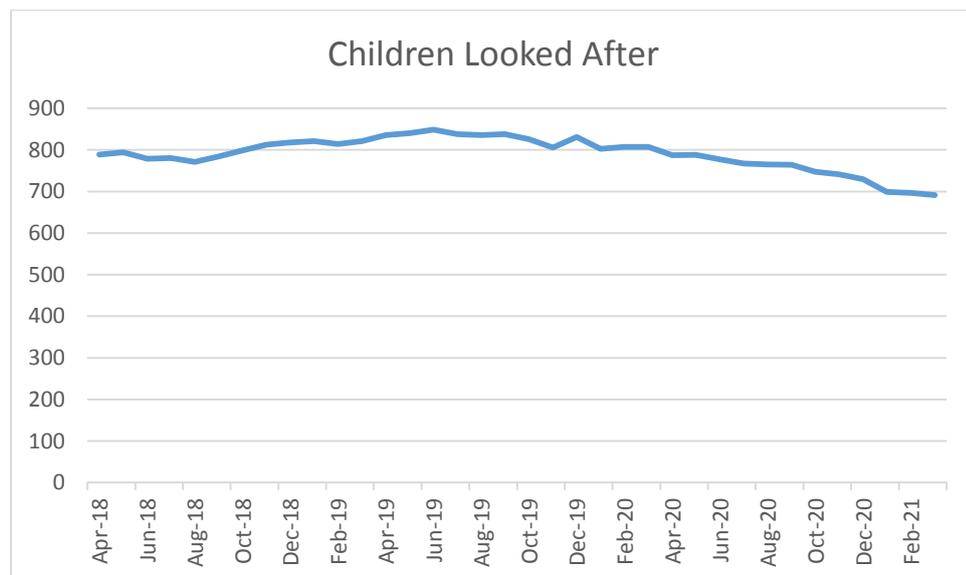
- **Transitions & care and pathway planning:** Continue to improve preparation for independence for Care Leavers and reduce the number of children and young people who experience poor outcome. Our focus has been on proactive care and Pathway planning that identifies clear routes and objectives to transition 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:** 2020/21 has been unique in relation to the disruption to education for many children and young people. Our Looked After and Care Leavers population have been supported with their education throughout this period, however the challenges to on-line learning and future employment/training has impacted. Throughout 21/22 each child's education, employment and training needs will be a priority working alongside the virtual school and employers to actively promote opportunities and support.

### 3. Children looked after: Demographics, health and education

3.1. The number of children that are looked after has further reduced by 12% during 2020/21. With a rate of 72.8 children per 10,000 being looked after in Croydon we continue to present a high rate compared to other London authorities (52.8), however we are closer to the average rate for England (67). If Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children are not counted in this rate then a rate of 50.7 was represented at 31/3/2021.

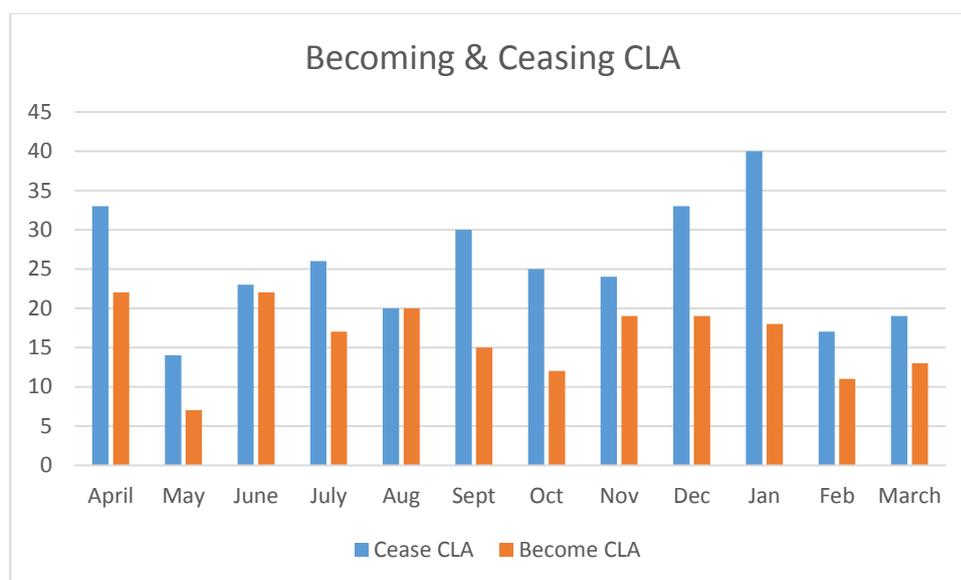


|                               | 2016         | 2017         | 2018         | 2019         | 2020         | 2021                 |
|-------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------------|
| <b>Croydon</b>                | <b>87.00</b> | <b>83.00</b> | <b>81.00</b> | <b>86.00</b> | <b>85.00</b> | <b>72.8</b>          |
| <b>Statistical Neighbours</b> | <b>56.30</b> | <b>54.20</b> | <b>54.60</b> | <b>53.70</b> | <b>52.8</b>  | <b>Not available</b> |
| <b>England</b>                | <b>60.00</b> | <b>62.00</b> | <b>64.00</b> | <b>65.00</b> | <b>67.00</b> | <b>Not available</b> |



3.2. During 2020/2021 there was a reduction of 22% in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum seeking children that are Looked After by Croydon, with 210 Unaccompanied children looked after at 31/3/2021.

3.3. The reduction in children Looked after can be seen in the comparison of the number of children becoming looked after 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. 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 2021 |       |            |       |
|----------------------|-------|------------|-------|
| MALE 51%             |       | FEMALE 49% |       |
| Under 10:            | 17.7% | Under 10:  | 28.6% |
| 10 - 17:             | 82.3% | 10 - 17:   | 71.4% |

3.5. **Ethnicity:** We are looking after a wide range of children from a diverse cultural and ethnic background. 37% of our children are recorded as White or White British, 27% 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. This reflects the CLA population in 2020 as well.

| ETHNIC ORIGIN OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AT 31 MARCH 2021 |     |
|---|-----|
| White British and White Other                           | 37% |
| Mixed   | 14% |
| Asian or Asian British                                  | 19% |
| Black or Black British                                  | 27% |
| Other ethnic groups                                     | 3%  |

- 3.6. **Type of placement:** In March 2021, 82% of our children were placed in Foster placements (compared with 72% of SNs and England Average data 2018/19). This is a 1% decrease from last year with 51% being placed with in-house foster carers. This is above the SNs 37% and England 50% rates for 2018/2019. 12% were in a Residential provision. The rest of our children were placed with prospective adopters or living with parents.
- 3.7. **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, 80% of all missing children during 2020/21 were looked after. When found in average 96% of children are offered a return home interview and 73% of children and young people participated 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.

#### 4. Health for Children Looked After

4.1. During 2020-2021, the way that Initial Health Assessments and Review Health Assessments are undertaken and monitored has been reviewed by the commissioners and includes an operations group chaired by the Service manager for CLA and a monthly quality assurance meeting.

4.2. Public Health have developed an improved CLA Health Needs Assessment to enable a better understanding of Children Looked after Health needs.

4.3. Care Leavers now benefit from a 'Health Passport' which helps them to have a greater understanding of their health needs and to access information. There was a delay in rolling this out due to Covid19, however this has now been in place since August 2020.

4.4. The table below shows the timeliness of assessments as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.

| Looked after children   | 2020 | 2021 |
|---|------|------|
| Percentage of children with health assessments on time<br>@31st March | 84%  | 90%  |



#### 5. Education of children looked after

**Schools:** In the academic year Sept 2020- July 2021, the Virtual School worked with 644 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 32 less CLA who were in care long term, than in the same period last year. There are a number of reasons for the reduction, including a reduced number of UASC YP during the Covid pandemic, an increased number of UASC YP have been transferred to other LA's, at least 15 who had been looked after by Croydon for over 12 months. (Currently 40 YP have ceased to be CLA during the academic year, following being CLA for over a year).

- 5.2. During 2020-2021 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:** 34% of the CLA cohort between 3 and 18 years old were recorded as having SEND needs in the academic year 2020/2021. Of these, 15% had an EHCP and 19% were classified by schools as receiving SEND support. This is a slight rise on 29% in 19-20.
- 5.4. Of the total number of children looked after at the end of the academic year, 54 (7%) attended special schools, a drop on 8% last year.
- 5.5. At the end of 2020/21, 92.4% of statutory school age CLA attended schools rated by Ofsted as 'Outstanding' or 'Good'. Compared to 90% 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 20-21 with a waiting list. The college had 6 places in 20-21.

*Educational Attainment at the end of 2021 academic year (predicted)*

- 5.7. 2020/2021 Academic Year was an unusual year with Covid19 ongoing throughout the school year and another full lockdown in the spring term 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 and KS2 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

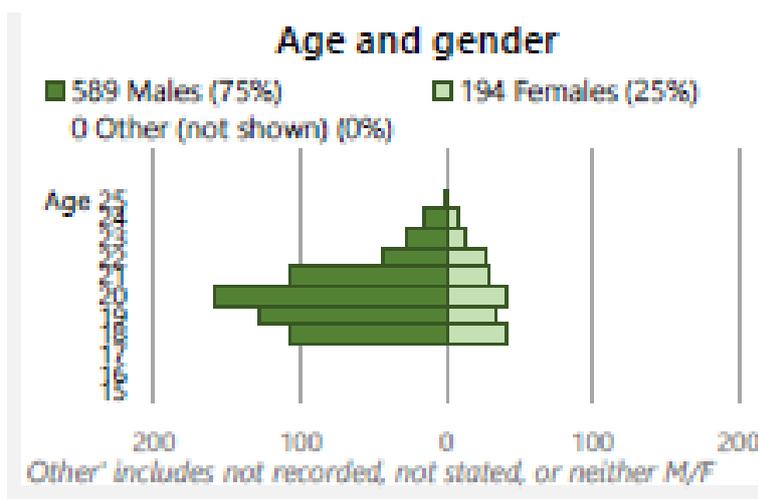
report will be presented to the Corporate Parenting panel. Some of the data submitted is hard to compare to previous years, however we are very proud of our children achievements and not least thankful to the support their carers provided to continue their learning. Currently out of the 15 KS1 pupils who have been CLA for more than a year, 13% are on track for nationally expected levels, with 53% on track for their personal targets in both Reading and Writing and 47% on track for personal targets in Maths. Of the 25 KS2 pupils who have been CLA for more than a year, 44% are on track for nationally expected levels, with 72% on track for their personal targets in Reading and 76% in Writing and 76% on track for personal targets in Maths. Out of the 73 KS4 CLA who have been in care for more than a year, 15% are on track to achieve 5+ GCSE grades including English and Maths at great 4 or above, 47% are on track to meet their own personal target in English and 51% in Maths.

- 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 2020/2021. 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. This is currently at 96.8%
- 5.10. **Exclusions:** There have been no permanent exclusions of Croydon CLA during the 2020/21 academic year, which is a decrease on the previous year's figure of 2.



## 6. Care Leavers:

- 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 2020, there were 848 young adults in Croydon's care leaver population, which had seen a steady increase during 2019. By March 2021 this number had decreased and there were 786 young people supported by our Leaving Care Service.
- 6.4. **Age and Gender:** 75% of our carer leavers are male and 25 % are females. The majority of our care leavers are between 18-21 years of age. This is relatively unchanged from the previous year.



6.5. **Ethnicity:** In terms of ethnicity, 32% as White British or White Others, 31% of our care leavers are recorded as Black or Black British , 26% recorded as Asian or Asian British, 6% are recorded as other ethnic group and

### Ethnic background

|                        |     |
|------------------------|-----|
| White                  | 32% |
| Mixed                  | 6%  |
| Asian or Asian British | 26% |
| Black or black British | 31% |
| Other ethnic group     | 6%  |
| Not stated             | 0%  |
| Not recorded           | 0%  |

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 dropped by 1% during 20/21 with 83% of care leavers having up to date plans. There is greater involvement of Young People in developing their pathway plans. The quality of Pathway plans has shown a gradual improvement through the bi-monthly audit process, with most now ranked as Good or above.

6.7. **Education, Employment and Training (EET):**

2020/2021 was a difficult year for many young people, with limited employment opportunities and a number of care leavers experiencing Furlough or uncertainty through zero hour contracts. Throughout 2020/21 there has been a

gradual decline in the numbers of care Leavers who are in Education, Employment or Training.

- 6.8. As at 31<sup>st</sup> march 2021 57% of care leavers were either in full time or part time Education, Employment or Training. This is an area of concern for us as we enter another year of uncertainty in relation to employment opportunities for young people.
- 6.9. During this period the support and help provided to young people by the income maximisation team has been immeasurable, assisting with housing benefit and entitlements.

## 7. Fostering

- 7.1. During 2020/21 the partnership arrangements with CORAM came to an end with recruitment campaigns now being managed in house. Our priority is particularly in finding homes for older children, sibling groups, children with disabilities and long- term placements.



- 7.2 As of March 2021 the Fostering Service had a total of 222 approved fostering households that 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. At the end of the year, 314 children looked after were placed with Croydon approved Foster carers.
- 7.3.. 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 support needs

for both carers and children with additional scrutiny. Foster Carers Annual Reviews completion in timescales performance was 95% for the year.

- 7.4.. 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.
- 7.5. . Our Foster carers have provided fantastic care for many children and young people during an unprecedented year. The additional pressures placed on family homes due to lockdown have been evident, however the strength of the support network around fostering has helped children maintain positive experiences of being cared for.



## 8. Adoption & Permanence

- 8.1. 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.
- 8.2. 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.

- 8.3. 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.
- 8.4. During 2020-2021, 19 Croydon children were adopted compared to 11 in 2019-2020. As with the previous year an average of 17 children were waiting to be matched with a prospective adoptive family at any point during the year. Average time between entering care and moving in with an adoptive family, for children who were adopted (536 days) has reduced from the previous year(553) and is now better than our SN's(549).
- 8.5. During the year 14 children left our care after the court granted a Special Guardianship Order to their carer, family members and/or friends.



## **9. Voice of children and young people in our care**

- 9.1. Croydon's Children in Care Council (E.M.P.I.R.E.) has an active membership and continued to meet virtually throughout the pandemic. 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. During Practice week (October 2020) young people's experience of transitions between services was provided and has informed a service restructure. E.M.P.I.R.E. was actively involved in helping to develop the sufficiency strategy, fostering service and in Croydon's commitment to challenging discrimination following the death of George Floyd in May 2020. The group will have its own section in Corporate Parenting Panel moving forward and will be supporting service development in a number of areas:

Housing conditions; Communication & Transparency; Care Leavers experience and setting up home allowances.



## **10. Independent visiting & Mentoring & Advocacy**

10.1. The Independent visiting service has continued to provide an independent contact for children looked after during Covid19. Many Independent Visitors maintained regular contact with children and young people, with face to face meetings taking place between lockdown periods. During 2020-2021 there was an average of 95 children and young people matched with an Independent Visitor. A recruitment campaign also took place recruiting a further 15 Independent visitors during the year.

10.2. The three Independent Visitor co-ordinators are now managed by the IRO Service Manager, building on the external scrutiny and support that the roles provide.

10.3. 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

10.4. 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.



## 11 Key achievements

11.1 2020-2021 has been unprecedented in the challenges faced for children, families and staff. Throughout the Covid restrictions virtual and face to face visits have continued to take place. Our use of technology has enabled different ways of engaging with many young people.

11.2. Our quality assurance activity has shown a gradual and sustained improvement in the quality of plans and work with children, although this remains a priority for us.

11.3. We have continued to limit the number of changes in social worker for children that are looked after with 72% having experienced no change in social worker over the last 6 months as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021

11.4. The Care Panel continues to be chaired by the Director for Children's Social care and has continued to ensure that only those children that need to become

looked after do, with improved support being provided to families to limit the need for care.

11.5. Our vulnerable children in care who are at risk of abuse and exploitation and reviewed regular via our Complex Adolescent Panel or MACE

### **Conclusion**

12.1. The challenges presented during 2020/2021 by Covid and the S114 notice have provided a difficult environment in which to continue to support children looked after and care leavers to the extent that we would want. While everyone has managed the challenges well we know that periods without face to face support has been far from ideal. That said, we have also seen increased engagement for some young people through the use of technology for meetings and support groups which we need to learn from.

12.2 Our performance measures have shown a maintenance of provision or improvement in most areas. Looking forward we expect to see demand for more emotional and wellbeing support for children and young people and the need to develop a robust and joined up response to mental health needs.

12.3 Croydon continues to provide support and care for many unaccompanied Asylum seeking children, which we are very proud of. There has been an increase in other local authorities taking on their responsibility for these vulnerable children and young people.

12.4 The real praise needs to go to all our children Looked After and Care Leavers who have shown amazing resilience and compassion during what has been an extremely difficult year for all children and young people.