

Decision Maker: CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND FAMILIES PDS COMMITTEE

Date: 15th March 2022

Decision Type: Non-Urgent

Title: CORPORATE PARENTING UPDATE 2020-2021

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Chief Officer: Director of Children's Social Care

Ward: All Wards

1. Reason for report

This report is to provide a mid-year update of the progress of children in care and care leavers in Bromley and identify progress made against the outcomes identified in the corporate parenting strategy.

2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

The Committee note and comment on progress made towards the actions identified in the Corporate Parenting Strategy as laid out in the outcomes and evaluation section of this report.

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Not Applicable:
 2. BBB Priority: Children and Young People:
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Not Applicable:
 2. Ongoing costs: Not Applicable:
 3. Budget head/performance centre:
 4. Total current budget for this head: £
 5. Source of funding:
-

Personnel

1. Number of staff (current and additional):
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours:
-

Legal

1. Legal Requirement: None:
 2. Call-in: Not Applicable:
-

Procurement

1. Summary of Procurement Implications: N/A
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Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected):
-

Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Not Applicable
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments: N/A

3. COMMENTARY

3.1 Covid has continued to dominate our lives and professional relationships. As a service we have continued to build on our knowledge and experience of working through the pandemic and have sought to innovate and provide creative solutions to reach out to all our young people despite the challenges. We were also lucky to be able to complete a full programme of summer activities again in Summer 2021 and were lucky to also hold an in-person Celebration of Success event for our Care Leavers in October 2021. Sadly, our corporate parenting Fun Day in Dec 2021 was cancelled due to concerns about the Omicron Variant, but we are hoping to reschedule as soon as possible.

3.2 We were subject to a focussed visit in Sept 2021 from Ofsted looking at the experiences of looked after children in Bromley who noted these successes and offered very positive feedback. Their headline findings were: 'Children in Bromley are recognised as a high priority and the lead member and the chief executive ensure that a consideration of their needs is championed and embedded in the wider council. Children in care in Bromley continue to make good progress, supported by a stable and skilled workforce. Ambitious and determined leadership ensures that services continue to strengthen so there is a positive experience for children in care. The local authority continues a positive trajectory of improvement supported by additional investment and resourcing. A new head of service for children in care provides strong and clear leadership.'

4. IMPACT ON VULNERABLE ADULTS AND CHILDREN **Performance Data 020-2021 Children Looked After**

4.1 As of January 2022, Bromley had 327 children looked after which is a slight drop from 338 in March 2021. Bromley's rate of children looked after Children per 10 000 has historically always been significantly below the national average. In 2019-20, our rate was 44 per 10 000 compared to the national average of 64. This figure remained static over 2020-2021 although there has been a slight drop to 43 per 10,000 in Nov 2021.

4.2 Of our children looked after 58% were male and the other 42% were female. In terms of ethnicity 58% of our children are white, 7% Black African, 8% Black Caribbean and 4% are Black other, 17% are from mixed heritage, 2% Asian and 4% other (comprising 40% being of BAME heritage). In Bromley 77% of our population are white British and a further 6 % of residents self-classifying as of White Irish, Traveller or White Other heritage. We have 5% of Asian heritage, 3% Black African, 2% Black Caribbean and 1% Black British/other, 4% of mixed Black African Caribbean or Asian and white heritage (23% in total from BAME groups). This clearly shows a disproportionate number of children from BAME groups in our community being represented in our care population which is being examined across services within the safeguarding partnership.

4.3 58% of our in-care population are male and are thus disproportionately represented in our care population. This is most likely linked to males coming into care due to criminal exploitation and offending behaviour but other may be vulnerable to family breakdown because of going missing and/or criminal exploitation.

4.4 In terms of ages of our children we have 15% 0–4-year-olds in care, the number of 5-to 9-year-olds is 13% both of which are in line with national averages. The number of adolescents (10-15 years) is currently 40%, remaining slightly above the London average of

39%. Our 16 /17-year-old cohort represents 32% of our in care population which is below the London comparator (37%).

4.5 In terms of placements 73% (241) of our children are currently in foster care, of that number 29% (94) are in house foster placements, 33% in IFA placements (107) and 12% (40) with connected persons/ family placements. Our residential population increased over the course of the year 20-21 from 66 to 73 in Jan 21 but has returned to 63 by the year end where it remains as of January 2022. Many of these young people have physical and /or learning disabilities and residential care mains the most appropriate resource. However, we remain ambitious in our search for long-term fostering options as a step down for children with emotional or behavioural needs that may make significant progress in residential care and be ready for a return to family life offering within a fostering placement. Similarly our % of young people placed 20 miles or more from the borough has slightly increased from 16% to 18%. Whilst every effort is made to keep children closer to home some children are placed at a distance to the borough due to safeguarding concerns particularly those who were being exploited in the community. There continues to be national issues around the sufficiency of placements and this area is under scrutiny in the government's Children's Social Care Review.

4.6 We have been able to make a significant impact in terms of placement stability over the course of the year. This is measured by the number of children aged 16 and under who have been in placement for two years or more. As of March 2020 this was 54% of looked after children. This also rose over the course of the year to 66% in March 2021. It currently remains at 69% as of January 2022, The number of young people who have experienced two or more placement moves over the calendar year has also fallen from 10% which is in line with national averages to 6%. We experienced much fewer moves during both national lockdowns with foster families and young people working together but we did see a pattern as both lockdowns eased that potential difficulties became more openly acknowledged and several long-term arrangements sadly became unstable. We also noted that some young people who have been vulnerable in the community to peer exploitation or negative influence had a period of greater stability when lockdown measures were tightly applied across the country. Again, as things eased missing episodes started to increase and some placements became more pressured. We have however worked with fostering colleagues to learn lessons from significant disruptions and create a better standard or practice around promoting stability through strong multi agency proactive work and creative support.

4.7 By July 2021 27% of our children had received a health assessment in the calendar year. This ended the previous year at 91%. 97% of young people were up to date with immunisations by July 2021 which is in fact an increase from 78% at end of year March 2020. Sadly young people with an up to date dental appointment which dropped from 91% in the year 19-20 to 35% by March 2021. This is due to most dental surgeries being closed for all but emergency treatment for much of last year. The service is working hard with CLA health colleagues to increase take up since lockdown has eased and we have climbed back to 61% of young people having seen in a dentist in the last 12 months by Jan 2022. There are national issues regarding a shortage of NHS dentists available but we are working through our data to ensure proactive follow up for all children whose dental appointment is outstanding to drastically improve this figure by the end of the reporting year. We can't currently report on Strengths and difficulties questionnaire as although the majority have been returned the data has not been successfully loaded into the new database.

4.8 Over 70% of our children looked after are secondary school and over and 46 children coming into care for the first time were aged between 13 and 17 last year.. These young people are often received into care due to concerns around contextual safeguarding and can be at risk from peers or exploitative adults in the community. This cohort of young people is tracked through MEGA panel (missing, exploitation and gangs). Ofsted noted : *'Risks to children looked after are clearly understood and responded to well. Strategy meetings are held as required. Children who go missing receive a bespoke response according to their need'*.

We have been receiving Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children through the National Transfer Scheme. Three young people who were dispersed by the Home Office in December and are anticipating 1 more referral. As of January 2022, we are supporting 7 under 18 UASC and 72 young people aged 18-25. This represents 15, 22–25-year-olds and 57, 18-21 year olds.

5. CARE LEAVERS

5.1 As at the 31st March 2019, we had corporate parenting responsibilities for 254 Care Leavers up to the age of 25, although only 193 care leavers chose to access services. As of March 31st 2020 279 care leavers were eligible for a leaving care service from Bromley and of that number, 234 were actively receiving services. In January 2022 we have 255 young people actively in receipt of a service from the Leaving Care Team which demonstrate exponential growth in the number of young people receiving a service.

5.2 Our care leaving population is also 63% male and therefore young men are disproportionately represented. Young people from Black, Asian, or mixed heritage origin also represent 6% of our leaving care population and which is also not representative of the wider demographics of Bromley but is reflective of the overall in care population. The data demonstrates that we are currently in touch with 85% of care leavers meaning they have had a visit within 8 weeks of reporting. We have 96% of young people in suitable accommodation which again shows improvements from 86% last year and 78% in the previous reporting year. Young people in custody are regarded as not in suitable accommodation. They will remain supported by their YPA and in receipt of a pathway plan to help prepare them for release back into the community. Bromley compared favourably against other local authorities in our Bright Spots Survey last year with 81% of our care leavers saying they always felt safe at home compared to 64% of care leavers in other local authorities. A further 11% said they felt safe most of the time and 8% saying they felt less safe.

5.2 When the first lockdown occurred in March 2020 there was an initial negative impact on ETE as many young people who were on zero hours contracts or casual employment lost out on work. Young people aged 19-21 in ETE in fact dropped to 17% in April 2020. In May this bounced back up to 49% and dropped back to 41% by March 2021 which compared well with national averages of 38%. We have continued to employ our ETE strategy of combining work with DWP and partners in Bromley education business partnership as well as virtual school to identify bespoke opportunities for our young people. We have also run our new beginnings pre-employment group work programme for young people who have been NETE for over three months. This group ran for the third time in September/October 2021 and overall 14 young people have attended with 8 young people having secured and maintained full time education or employment subsequently and a further young person has a Kickstarter interview next week.

5.3 We also worked with HR to create Kickstarter opportunities within the council and three of our young people were successfully employed; one as a market supervisor, one as a digital information assistant and another as the Active Involvement engagement worker. We also have

two care leavers start their ASYE in social work, based in the Youth Offending Service in August 2021. Our ETE figures had climbed to 54% by January 2022 which is hugely positive.

5.4 We are increasingly offering support for young people with Mental Health needs and are offering support beyond the age of 21 for young people with complex needs. This is in line with the extension of leaving care duties as outlined in the Social Work Act 2017. We have worked with colleagues in adult services to create a transition panel to ensure young people with such needs receive suitable support to aid successful transition to adulthood. However some of our young people struggle to engage with statutory services and we had identified gaps in provision for young people needing an assertive outreach approach, We have been fortunate to obtain funding from the CCG and from Public Health to create a full time Mental Health Practitioner post who sits within the Leaving Care Service. The post holder offers support to young people who may struggle to engage with clinic-based support or may not reach threshold for Community Mental Health Services. We successfully recruited in August 2021 and to date 29 young people have been referred for a variety of interventions such as support around anxiety and depression, planning around hospital discharge and identification of future therapy. Twenty-Four young people have actively engaged with the service and are in receipt of ongoing support. We are hopeful that we may be able to achieve ongoing funding for the continuation of this valuable work.

6. PROGRESS OF PRIORITIES AS SET OUT IN CORPORATE PARENTING REPORT 19/20

6.1 Priority 1: Having a Say

Active Involvement in conjunction with our young people have created and delivered a training package for all staff across Children's Services and foster carers to focus on the quality of relationship. This was delivered in October and received really positive feedback. The training is being delivered to CLA service in March 2022.

The savings and pocket money policy has been reviewed and new guidelines created. All children will receive £5 a week in savings which will be paid directly into savings accounts held by the council to ensure young people have a financial cushion on leaving care in addition to their Setting Up Home Allowance.

Young people have been involved in recruitment activity for the new DCS as well as a placement officer, Young Person Adviser and new Team Manager in the CLA service throughout 2021.

Young people have created a series of videos focussed on race and culture as well as their care journeys which have been used as part of training our staff around listening to young people's voices and promoting their identity needs.

The Young Inspectors Programme has continued during 2021 with 2 young people being trained to work alongside our placement officer to offer quality assurance feedback around our placement providers. This programme has offered valuable insight into what makes a difference for young people.

6.2 Priority 2 Support, Stability and Security

Long term stability improved over 2020-2021 from 56% to 66% which has been hugely positive. However, we did notice that with lockdown coming to an end a number of longer term placements becoming unstable. We have worked with colleagues in fostering and Thrive therapeutic service to offer positive support to placements before they hit a crisis.

This includes a variety of measures such as bespoke key work / mentoring support for vulnerable young people, therapeutic packages for carers and young people and respite when appropriate.

We remain part of the Commissioning Alliance and work with colleagues in the Central Placement Team to identify placements that are matched according to need.

Ofsted noted : 'Children benefit from good placement stability and are settled and doing well where they live, in appropriately matched and caring homes. Children placed at a distance receive a similarly high degree of support and services are promptly provided for them.'

6.3 Priority 3: Health and Wellbeing

We ran a programme of in-person social events over summer 2021 including a film project, a photography project, a wellbeing week and care leavers week including a trip to Brighton to offer young people opportunities to make friends and reduce isolation. We also partnered with Churchill Theatre to run a drama project where young people created a drama piece to present to their carers. All events were highly successful and received positive feedback. We also ran in person events for Black History Month including a film night and a Come Dine with Me experience.

We were also delighted that our Celebration of Success event was able to take place 'in person' in conjunction with Bromley College in October 2021. All the young people attended and received an award from the Mayor noting their academic and personal achievements over a challenging year.

6.4 Priority 4: Education, Training and Employment

Ongoing work with the DWP, Virtual school, Active Involvement team, Bromley Education Business Partnership and Targeted Youth Support has seen ETE rise. As of January 2022 we have 64% of our care leavers in full or part time ETE.

The Ofsted focussed visit reported 'A proactive Virtual School advocates strongly for appropriate educational provision'. We also refer to Maximus a third sector organisation that offer 1:1 support for young people at risk of NETE from the age of 16 to ensure we have a range of services on offer. We have partnered with I Aspire , a De Paul social enterprise programme who have offered 1:1 mentoring for young people who are NETE.

92% of CLA started year 12 with a secure place in a sixth form or college in September 2021. This is a 20% increase in the last 4 years. Of the 16 (most likely to be NEET) who engaged with "Fresh Start" over the summer, 14 are still in their college place as of November 2021. In total in 2020/21 we had a total of 24 enrolled in higher education L4+ courses, compared with 22 last year. We have 8 care leavers who have started an undergraduate course in 2021. We are exceptionally proud of them for continuing with their studies particularly given the challenges of studying throughout the pandemic. Our education partners are working with the Bromley Mentoring Programme to create a mentoring programme for young people at university or aspiring to go to university to reduce isolation and raise ambition.

6.5 Priority 5: Transitions and Independence

Bromley joined the Care Leaver Covenant in October 2021 when they presented at the Corporate Parenting Board. This affords our young people pan London opportunities such as access to work and training placements, access to discounts and offers for mobile technology as well as access to counselling support.

Leaving Care Team are also in the process of revising the Local Offer in conjunction with our staff, statutory partners and young people to ensure it provides clear information and is responsive to young people's needs.

The Leaving Care Team have created a 'moving on group' which ran for the first time in July 2021. They offered sessions focussed on support for young people moving into their own

tenancy. This included workshops around budgeting, managing relationships and housing rights and entitlement. The group will run again in Spring 2022.

The Leaving Care Team continue to work with Adult Services to ensure young people with more complex needs are in receipt of suitable support. The Principal Social worker for adults delivered training to the service around threshold for adult safeguarding to all staff in November 2021. The transitions panel also continues bi-monthly for professionals in Adult Mental Health, Learning Disability and Complex Care teams to discuss cases with Children's Services. The panel is chaired by Head of Service for SEND to consider young people with complex needs and ensure there is suitable support in place to ensure smooth transition to adulthood.

6.6 Conclusion

Ofsted noted that staff felt well supported and an open learning culture ensured staff were offered suitable opportunities for development. They noted there was a strong culture of audit and critical challenge to drive improvements, and they noted evidence of strong management oversight. As a service we have continued to innovate despite the challenges of the pandemic and strengthen our offer to our young people.

Non-Applicable Sections:	Financial Implications, Personnel Implications, Legal Implications, Procurement Implications
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	[Title of document and date]