



Children's Services

222 Upper Street, London N1 2UD

**Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Board 2019-2020**

**Report of Karen Gibbings Head of Service CLA**

Meeting of	Date	Agenda Item	Ward(s)
Corporate Parenting Board	January 2021		

Delete as appropriate	Exempt	Non-exempt



**1) Introduction**

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the achievements, progress, challenges in meeting the needs of Islington's children looked after, and care experienced young people from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

This report draws on information from reports presented to Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) over the last year and on OFSTED's Inspection of Islington's Children's Services which took place in March 2020.

Islington Council's children looked after (CLA) service was responsible for 366 looked after children, including 67 Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) and 426 Care Leavers as of 31 March 2020. The majority of our looked after children are over the age of 15 and are males (61%). There continues to be an over representation of children in care from Black and Black British heritage which is being further scrutinised. Islington continues to have a higher number of children looked after than other Inner London Local Authorities and transformation work is underway to understand why this is and what other types of intervention other than care would improve their outcomes.

The CLA service also works with children in need, in need of protection and with children and families in adoptive and special guardianship placements. Children and young adults benefit from a stable and committed staff team including 148 Foster Carers (122 mainstream fostering households) and a robust Independent Reviewing Service.

Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) has a responsibility to monitor and review the quality and effectiveness of services for children looked after and care experienced young people delivered by the council, partner agencies and commissioned services to ensure that every child and young person looked after is supported to be safe, happy, healthy and to achieve their full potential. In addition, it has a key role in listening to the voice of children and young people looked after and leaving care.

The Board is co-chaired by the chair of our Children's Active Involvement Service (CAIS) and the Lead member for Children, Young People and Families. A group of young people from CAIS attend each Board and robustly represent the views and interests of Islington's children looked after, and care experienced young people. Young people run workshop style sessions every other meeting allowing day to day issues that are real for them to be discussed at the Board. There is a high level of participation from Members of the Board and young people have a real voice and opportunity to improve services.

Islington's Plan for Children Looked After and Care Experienced Young People 2018-2020 set out our vision for ensuring that children, young people and their families have the best opportunities in life. This plan has been previously scrutinised by CPB and accompanies this report to update CPB on our progress in improving services to children and young people. Our plan for 2021-2023 will be presented to Corporate Parenting Board in May 2021 for scrutiny. Our Pledges to children and Care Leavers Charter offer will be reviewed in 2021 with CAIS.

## **2) Improving services to children and young people**

There has been a continuing focus on embedding our practice model within the service throughout the year in order to improve the quality of relationships and work with children looked after, care experienced young people and foster carers. Staff have continued to receive ongoing training, coaching, reflective supervision, group supervision and clinical support.

In order to help achieve this between June and September 2019 the service was reorganised. The aim of the reorganisation was to:

- Be more ambitious for children and young people and improve their outcomes by supporting them to come to terms with their losses, experience reparative parenting, establish meaningful relationships and by promoting their education, training and employment opportunities to enable them to lead fulfilling and successful lives.
- Develop a culture of relationship based trauma informed practice that helps to improve the quality of relationships with children and young people.
- Create a skilled workforce of practitioners and managers with access to good support and the conditions that enable trauma informed practice.

- Improve placement stability by providing skilled support to foster carers, adopters and special guardians and working more effectively as a team around the carer.
- Reduce the number of young people in residential placements and increase the number of children and young people with complex needs in in-house foster placements.
- To create smaller teams with lower caseloads and Social Work Coordinators to allow professionals to build relationships and work intensively with young people, families and carers.
- Provide intensive support to young people, families and carers to reduce the risk of family breakdown and support the rehabilitation of children home.

There were a number of substantial changes within the service, which included extending the remit of Independent Futures. Independent Futures now provides a service to all children looked after aged 16 and above once they have completed their GCSEs.

A Permanency Team was also set up which is responsible for all permanency planning for children, liaison with the Regional Adoption Agency, quality assurance of adoption and long term fostering practice, assessment of family and friends, supervision of family and friends foster carers and providing a special guardianship support (SGO) service.

Services to children and young people have benefited positively from the continuing integration of our practice model and the changes we have made but increased levels of demand adversely impacted on the progress we had anticipated making over the year. Since March 2020, COVID has further affected the implementation of the vision. Plans are in place to reduce the numbers of children becoming looked after through preventative interventions, which will have a positive impact on service delivery in the CLA service, through lower caseloads.

Adopt North London came into being on the 1 October 2020 and is responsible for providing adoption services for Islington (the host borough), Haringey, Barnet, Camden, Enfield and Hackney.

### **3) Key achievements of 2019-2020 include**

Embedding our Motivational Practice model across the service.

Some excellent direct work with children and young people evidenced in improved outcomes, feedback from children and their families and OFSTED.

Improving stability for some of our children looked after. (See section 6 below)

A good OFSTED rating for Children Looked After and Care Leavers

Comprehensive support for our Unaccompanied and Separated children and young people (UASC) that impacts positively on outcomes for them. In November 2019, Islington's Safeguarding and Family Support Services organised and hosted the first national conference focused on improving the experiences of UASC in the UK. Lord Dubs, local authorities, voluntary sector, health, attended this and legal leads from across the country as well as the Home Office.

Children and young people within the context of increased demand received an excellent health service. This is evident in the timeliness and quality of medical assessments for children and advice to carers and colleagues.

Embedding clinical support within the Service to ensure that there is multi-disciplinary expertise in the delivery of support to children, carers and families.

The partnership working developed by the Virtual School and College and the comprehensive support by the service to promote education, employment and training opportunities.

The House Project has become part of Children's Services core establishment.

The creation of the Permanency Service and its positive impact on improving permanency planning.

Pause Islington has been running in Islington since September 2015, and has worked with 55 women, who have 172 children in care between them.

The resilience and tenacity of practitioners and managers and their commitment to making a difference to children's lives.

Independent Futures who adapted positively to substantial changes maintaining a high quality service to our children and young people.

Islington's foster carers commitment and resilience during this pandemic.

Our contact team who continue to provide an excellent environment for children to have contact with their birth families.

Creation of the Regional Adoption Agency.

OFSTED recognised that our Children in Care Council is highly influential within and across Islington. The chair and vice-chair are both care leavers, and many children in care and care leavers have been engaged in a wide variety of projects, including the delivery of training and the recruitment of staff at all levels of children's services.

Young people had asked for an app with information about the services available to them and this has been designed and is about to be launched.

Young people had said they wanted to be involved in the work about 16+ accommodation. The Young Commissioners project was established with young people visiting semi independence units to talk to young people and provide training for staff.

#### **4) Some of the challenges in 2019- 2020**

There have been continuing challenges in meeting the needs of some of our children looked after who are adolescents particularly in identifying and sustaining placements that meet their needs and help reduce risk associated with exploitation and mental health. Work with this group of children is currently subject to a review, which will inform and impact on practice in 2021.

Meeting the needs of young people with mental health difficulties particularly when transitioning into adulthood. A task and finish group is currently reviewing work in this area.

Meeting the needs of children who return to live with their birth family and are subject to supervision orders. A plan is in place to further enhance practice in this area.

Maintaining the quality of family and friends assessments when service demand increased. Plans are in place to rectify this.

Reaching our ambitious target that 70% of our care experienced young people are in Education, Employment and Training (EET). Plans are in place to continue to improve outcomes in this area but given COVID this has been and will be very challenging.

There has been a decrease in the number of in house foster placements available and during 2019-2020, recruitment of new foster carers was difficult with only 6 being approved. We are expecting to recruit 11 in 2020-21 but recruitment remains challenging.

The county went into lockdown on the 23 March 2020. This of course has had an enormous impact on children and young people we are corporate parents for. It has meant that some young people have had to adjust to more virtual support; there has been an increase in emotional distress/mental health issues, some face-to-face contact between children and their families has been reduced and it has impacted significantly on children's education and employment opportunities.

## 5) OFSTED

OFSTED concluded in March 2020 that children's services were outstanding. Services for children in care and care leavers were assessed as good and improving. Detailed below are some of the key achievements that were recognised:

### **CLA teams, Permanence and Fostering**

- Children live in safe, stable, good-quality placements with experienced, skilled, well-supported carers who provide them with emotional warmth, stability and the nurturing that they need to develop confidence and overcome adversity.
- Social workers and other professionals work tirelessly to help children to feel safe, to recover from trauma and to achieve. Risks are assessed and responded to well
- The judiciary speaks highly of social workers in Islington. The quality of assessments is good, and care plans are well evidenced to inform decision-making and the timely conclusion of proceedings.
- Permanence for all children is considered early, and alternative plans are progressed speedily for children who are unable to live safely with their families.
- Experienced, highly skilled and confident social workers know their children well who They have high aspirations for children and young people and advocate on their behalf to ensure access to the services that they need.

- Children's wishes and feelings are actively sought and acted on. Social workers undertake sensitive, thoughtful and creative life-story work, which helps children to understand the reasons for being in care.
- Co-location of mental health specialists with social workers promotes early consideration and provision of services to address children's emotional needs. As a result, children's experiences improve when they come into care.
- Children's interests, hobbies and activities are actively encouraged.
- Children are supported to attend their reviews, and independent reviewing officers (IROs) provide effective oversight and challenge in the majority of cases.
- Children's health and education needs are carefully considered, and they have good access to advocates and independent visitors.
- A review and a re-structuring of fostering services has improved placement stability.
- Most children who are placed back with their parents are appropriately cared for, and their needs are well met. However, a very small number of young people at high risk of exploitation and gang involvement, whose placements have broken down, have been placed with their parents while extensive searches are undertaken for more suitable placements. The inspectors considered that in relation to these two children managers had not ensured that sufficient safety and contingency plans were in place to try to mitigate these risks. In response to this there is now a high-risk multi agency panel chaired by the Director of Safeguarding that oversees and reviews safety planning for these children.

### **Virtual School**

- The Virtual School is well led, and school staff and those from the Virtual School know their children well. As a result, the curriculum offered is tailored well to meet their specific needs. Over time, children make good progress from their starting points, both academically and socially. The pupil premium is used well to support progress. The quality of personal education plans for school-aged children has improved since the previous inspection, and these plans are now good. A good range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities helps children and young people to pursue their interests and to develop their broader skills and knowledge. Young people are well prepared for their next steps when they leave school. As a result, an increasing proportion of young people remain in education and training when they start Year 12.

### **Independent Futures**

- Care leavers live in suitable accommodation and are helped to move towards independence and to manage their own tenancies at their own pace.
- Care leavers have many opportunities to get involved with and influence how the service is run, and their views are carefully considered.
- Young people benefit from stable, trusting relationships with workers who find creative ways to meet and engage with them. The local authority is in touch with the majority of its care leavers, and workers are persistent in their efforts to see young people, ascertain their welfare and provide the right support.
- Pathway plans are routinely in place; they are of good quality and they are mostly up to date. The majority of plans capture young people's views. Good consideration is given to past history and trauma, and this contributes to clear action planning. The inspectors found that some care

leavers do not have opportunities to be involved in their pathway plans and do not routinely receive copies of these plans. Changes have been made to LCS so we can monitor this more effectively.

- Inspectors concluded that Health histories were not routinely provided to young people. They have been but were not being uploaded consistently onto the young person’s record in Independent Futures, which is why the Inspectors could not see them. This is rectified and audits are planned.
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are very well supported in accommodation that meets their needs. A high-quality bespoke project manager assists and develops the skills of carers and offers consultation to social workers to better meet the needs of these young people. As a result, the young people make progress and benefit from being in care and from the support provided to them as care leavers.
- Care leavers benefit from access to an employment specialist, who works with them to access work, apprenticeships and further education that meets their needs.
- The House Project is an innovative and highly valued service that is making a significant difference for care leavers. Young people said to inspectors that being involved in the project makes them feel like they have a family.

## 6) Stability and Permanency

A key focus over this year has been improving stability for children and young people. We recognise that repeated placement moves can cause a great deal of disruption to our children and make it challenging for them to build reparative relationships, do well educationally and achieve their potential.

We have seen some improvement in placement stability, which we need to build on to ensure that children only move as part of their care plan, rather than in emergency situations, and to facilitate permanency in their lives or transition towards adulthood.

CLA Placement Stability at 31.3.2020				
	Islington	Stat Neighbours	Inner London	England
Short term- the lower the percentage the better	9.8% (11.8% in 2018/19)	11.0%	11%	11%
Long term- the higher the percentage the better	73.1% (68.9% in 2018/19)	70.7%	69%	68%

A certain number of placement moves is expected and planned for such as children moving to long term placements, to adoption and reunification with their siblings or families. However, placement moves are also due to a range of challenges that means that a placement move becomes necessary.

**Short Term Placement Stability** (children aged 0-17 who have experienced two or more placement moves in the last year)

As in 2018/19 analysis regarding placement stability in 2019/20 concludes that it is the children with the most complex needs (are older when they come into our care, have an Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP), are known to be physically violent and/or have experienced complex trauma in their parents' care) are likely to have the most moves. We have continued to struggle to identify the right placements for some of these children, where they can be supported to settle, engage in a range of resources including education, and where they have their needs met on a long term more consistent basis.

The main reason for placement moves of all of our children and young people was that their carers (either foster care or residential care) were unable to manage their emotional or behavioural needs – 55% of placement moves. In some cases the carers decided that they were unable to meet the needs of the children in their care any longer and in others the Local Authority and its partners assessed that the carers were unable to meet the needs of the child and proposed a placement move. The reasons that carers requested a move for the children included them feeling intimidated by the child in their care, feeling unable to manage the risks associated with the child being involved in criminal activity or gangs, the child not making use of the placement through going missing frequently, or other challenges posed by the child's emotional and behavioural needs.

Some of the reasons that we proposed moves for our children were concerns about how carers were responding to the child in their care, or concerns regarding the complexity of the child's needs and more specialist provisions being needed. The challenge is that when placements end in these circumstances, it often results in children moving in an emergency, which allows for less planning than is ideal, particularly given the complexity of the needs of this cohort, and this in turn increases the instability of the new placement. Even when additional support packages are put in place, and the reasons for placement moves are explored, placement instability continues to be a challenge. For most children once the right provision is found, they are able to settle and engage more with the placement even if they continue to struggle with other aspects of their life including education and employment.

This year, 8% of placement moves were linked to residential assessment centres, linked to Care Proceedings for the youngest children in our care. These moves are not within our control as a Local Authority, and are necessary to ensure that parents are properly assessed to consider if they can safely care for their children.

Of note, is that 8% of the moves involved children moving into or on from their parents' care or an emergency placement with a relative. In the most part this is a reflection of the challenges in identifying placements for our adolescent cohort. When no suitable placement can be identified, some of our children have to return to their parents/ a family member's care in the short term (with appropriate support packages) whilst new placements are identified for them. It is recognised that this is not always ideal, and that it can be confusing for both our children and their parents, as well

as at times escalating risk. In one case, the child returned to their parent's care in an emergency and following assessments, the plan is now for them to remain there until they turn 18. The high risk children placed at home meeting was established from April 2020 to review all of these cases. It is chaired by the Director of Safeguarding and attended by Senior Managers from partner agencies.

7% of moves were linked to young people being placed into or being released from secure welfare, or custody (either on remand or serving a custodial sentence). Of the remaining 22% of placement moves, these took place for a wide range of reasons, for example, complex mental health needs of our children or extended respite provisions (that lasted longer than the 3 weeks allowed by the government guidance).

**Long Term stability** (children aged 0-16 who have been in our care for at least 2.5 years, and have experienced a placement move in the last 2 years)

At the end of March 2020, 94 children (26% of our entire Looked After child population) had been looked after for more than two and a half years by Islington. 25 of these children had experienced a placement move in the preceding two years, meaning that 73.1% of the children aged 0-16 in our long term care were in stable placements.

Of the 25 children considered not to be in a stable placement at that time, 16 children (64%) are now in what their Social Workers consider to be a stable placement, including adoption, foster carers committing to them long term, residential care and being placed in the care of their parents. There are clear care plans for those who are not in stable placements.

There continues to be a small cohort of adolescent boys where it is particularly challenging to identify the right placement for them that is able to provide for them with a trauma informed response to their presentation and provide them with the consistency and care that they clearly need.

Our practice model continues to support practitioners to build relationships with all of the children in our care, their carers and their parents, in order to support placements and identify what the right placement for our children is at the earliest possible opportunity. The embedding of this model through workshops, group supervision and the support of the CAMHS clinicians across the CLA service all support the skills and confidence of foster carers and practitioners in the CLA, IF and fostering service, which in turn supports long term placement stability for our children.

The Permanency Service supports careful planning by practitioners in the CLA service and a thoughtful approach to the needs of our children and their carers to ensure children are placed in the right placements wherever possible. A robust permanency planning protocol is in place and Permanency Planning Meetings are happening much more consistently.

The integrated CAMHS service is now supporting initial formulation meetings to think about the child's experiences before coming into care and how this might impact on them in their placement. They also are offering parenting consultation meetings for the supervising Social Workers and CLA Social Workers for children placed with in house carers, to support the Social Workers to undertake effective direct work with the carers in order to support the placement. In addition, there is a current review of lifestory work taking place across the service which will support practitioners in the CLA service to offer effective lifestory work to our children who remain in care (rather than for only

those who leave care through adoption or Special Guardianship arrangements), and in turn support children's understanding of why they are in care to support placement stability in the short and long term.

## **7) Recruitment of foster carers**

There has been considerable recruitment activity over the last few months. The Recruitment and Assessment Team are in the process of rebranding all fostering campaigns in conjunction with the Communications Team. There are different campaigns for the various carers we need to recruit, including mainstream, specialist and respite foster carers and short break and supported lodging carers.

Fortnightly Action Sprint meetings have been set up and are chaired by the Director of Safeguarding to focus on the marketing campaign with the aim of driving up foster carer recruitment with pace.

This financial year so far (20/21) we have approved six fostering households, including one specialist foster carer, there are a further five households in assessment which will be taken to Fostering Panel before the end of March 2021. This is a marked increase from 2019-2020 where there were only six fostering households approved.

The induction of newly approved foster carers has been reviewed and the training programme for foster carers has been revised and new courses added. The specialist foster care scheme is being developed to grow our number of specialist foster carers for teenagers as well as younger children. This has included reviewing the fee provided to these carers. There is an internal and external campaign, with the aim of upskilling current mainstream foster carers to become specialist foster carers, as well as specifically recruiting specialist foster carers by targeting people who have experience of working with children and young people in different fields such as the Police, YOS, Education or NHS.

Fostering commissioned an initial assessment and feasibility exercise to determine how many additional in-house fostering placements might be achieved through the provision of a housing adaptation programme for existing foster carers. This also included determining the likely cost and cost benefit of such a scheme. The first phase of a 3 phased programme to assess, plan and execute a housing adaption scheme has recently been completed. The aim is to increase in-house foster carer capacity by at least 10 and up to 18 placements over an estimated 18 month period.

The service is in the process of developing a scheme to support foster carers and in turn, this will increase placement stability. We have named it Circles of Support. It is broadly based on the Mockingbird Family Model.

The placements service have also launched focused recruitment events, together with the CLA service where their Social Workers present our children to approved carers to try to identify positive matches with experienced foster carers. There has been a positive outcome for a number of children from the 3 events held so far including finding a foster placement for the three siblings outlined above, and a placement for a sibling group of 5 together.

**Key priorities for 2020-21 for the Fostering Service and CLA teams are:**

- 1) Embedding initial formulation meetings and PACE for parenting
- 2) Recruitment of specialist and mainstream carers
- 3) Setting up Circle of support
- 4) Reviewing and developing our marketing strategy
- 5) Developing the skills of supervising social workers and managers through additional coaching and training
- 6) Implement the NSPCC reunification framework
- 7) Review permanency protocol including assessment framework for siblings
- 8) Implement revised life story work protocol.

**8) Children missing from care**

Between April 2019 and March 2020, 91 children went missing from care due to either going missing or being away from their placement unauthorised by their carer. 27% were girls and 73% boys. Within this time, there were 628 individual unique incidents where a child went missing from care. This demonstrates that a similar amount of children and young people are going missing from care as the previous year, but they are going missing more frequently.

Ten children accounted for 258 missing from care episodes (41% of all missing episodes). The majority of the ten children had been in care for over a year and have multiple risk factors. These children were at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) or were Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC). Of the 91 children who went missing from care 18%, 14 children were assessed to be at risk of CSE, 21%, 16 children are considered to be at risk of CCE and serious youth violence. Children at additional risk are more frequently going missing from care and are missing for longer durations.

The Exploitation and Missing Team work to support the Child Looked After (CLA) service to coordinate the safeguarding response to children that go missing from care with the professional network including the missing police unit where the child is placed. The Exploitation and Missing Team independently chairs strategy meetings for children missing from care where needed. They have also gathered the views of 200 young people to contribute towards planning of services.

Senior Managers and council leaders are provided with weekly briefings about any children and young people that are missing, providing an explanation of what we know about the situation as well as what the professional network around the child are doing to address the concerns and reduce the risk.

**Key recommendations 2020/2021 for children who go missing from care:**

- 1) To continue to closely monitor the children and young people with the highest number of missing episodes to ensure that effective multi agency services are being offered and consider whether missing episodes can be reduced both in terms of frequency and how long they are going missing for.
- 2) To review services for adolescents across Islington Children's Services to consider the children and young people who come into our care at an older age (13+) and where there

continue to be very high safeguarding concerns and where they go missing frequently, to consider whether there are alternative services or strategies that could be used with them.

- 3) For actions and recommendations from Return Home Interviews to be consistently reviewed by social workers and their managers, and embedded in practice.
- 4) To develop how we gather and utilise the views of children and families involved in Exploitation to inform the development of our services.
- 5) To implement the use of the Philomena Protocol (project with the police about ensuring young people are only reported missing after attempts have been made to locate them) for young people aged 13 to 17 in care.

## **9) Health of looked after children**

Children and young people continue to receive a high quality compressive service from our health colleagues, which is detailed in Dr Evanson's thorough Health report, which is being presented to Board with this report.

Islington Child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) has a specialist multi-disciplinary team for Islington CLA. The specialist team is resourced to provide a designated mental health service to Islington's population of CLA aged 0-18. Children living in or attending School in Islington can also access other teams in Islington Community CAMHS where this better meets their need. This year the team have expanded and have become embedded within the Children Looked after Service. This integration has been a real success affecting positively on our work with children and their families. The team offer:

- A responsive and accessible CAMHS service to children and young people, their carers and professional networks.
- Specialist mental health advice and consultation to social workers and other professionals.
- Specialist psychological assessment and/or psychotherapeutic Interventions for CLA and their families and carers.
- Training for Islington's Foster Carers and Professionals working with Islington's CLA.

## **10) Education of Looked After Children & Care experienced young people**

The cancellation of examinations, end of Key Stage assessments, and the overall impact of Covid 19 means the reporting and analysis of outcomes is significantly different this year. While it is possible to provide a commentary and some analysis of the outcomes children and young people achieved, comparisons with previous years and with other children and young people is not possible.

### **Key Stage 2 outcomes**

Of the pupils assessed at the end of March 62% were working at the expected standard in reading, writing and Maths.

*Key factors influencing outcomes at KS2 were:*

- Higher outcomes are achieved by pupils who have been in care longer

- Pupils who were working at the expected level in reading, writing and maths were in stable foster and school placements
- Those with Education, Health and Care Plans did not achieve as highly as other pupils
- Pupils who did not meet the expected standard in all areas still made good progress
- There is clear evidence of the positive impact of additional support, including the use of Pupil Premium Grant, provided by the Virtual School.

### **Key Stage 4 outcomes**

**The reporting Key stage 4 was 36 children.**

- 61% (22) achieved 1 or more GCSEs
- 28% (10) achieved 5 or more GCSEs, including English and Maths at grade 4 or above
- 81% (29) of year 11 pupils achieved any qualification

As in previous years, this year's cohort were complex and diverse. However, we were pleased that a high number of pupils achieved positive GCSE results. It is clear that some pupils, especially those with complex needs, benefitted from their GCSEs being assessed by their teachers this year

### **Key factors influencing outcomes**

- Placement and school stability continues to be the most significant factor influencing outcomes. Pupils who moved placement or school achieved lower outcomes than those in stable school and placements
- Pupils living in foster care achieved higher outcomes than those in residential care, although this is not a significant as previous years
- Pupils who attend mainstream school achieve higher outcomes than those in non-mainstream school, although the gap is not as great as in previous years
- Girls achieve higher outcomes than boys, both in terms of the number of qualifications achieved and the grades they received
- There is a marked difference between the results of different ethnic groups and this is more apparent this year than other years. 15% of Black pupils achieved at least 5 GCSE at grades 4 or above compared to 38% of White pupils and 50% of pupils of a mixed ethnicity.

### **Attendance and exclusions**

Average attendance up to the end of March was 89% for the reporting cohort, which is roughly in line with previous years. There were no permanent exclusions in 2019/20, the same as the previous year. 24 pupils had one or more fixed term exclusions, this is a concern. Black pupils, particularly boys had higher exclusion rates than White pupils.

## **11) Post 16 Looked-After Children and Care Leavers Education, Employment and Training.**

Many Islington care experienced young people achieve successful education and employment outcomes and are well supported by their Personal Adviser or Social Worker, the Virtual School and their carers. Islington has historically had a high number of care leavers studying in Higher

Education, which reflects the positive work staff do with children and young people to develop their aspirations and promote positive outcomes.

As with qualification as KS4, analysis of post 16 qualifications should be treated with caution. The confusing nature of the publications of this year's BTEC and A level results has made our analysis limited and cautious. We are in the process of consulting with Local Authorities to help analyse why there is a 10% difference between Islington and our statistical neighbours.

<b>Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training (EET) rates, as of 31.3.2020 (Aged 17 and 18)</b>				
	<b>Islington</b>	<b>Stat Neighbours</b>	<b>Inner London</b>	<b>England</b>
<b>Total % in EET</b>	58.3% (52.7% in 2018/19)	68.9%	72%	64%
<b>Total % not in EET</b>	37.5% (42.9% in 2018/19)	27.9%	25%	31%
<b>Local authority does not have information</b>	4.2% (4.4% in 2018/19)	Not Available due to suppressed numbers	4%	6%

## 12) Care experienced young people

Intensive work has been undertaken by Independent Futures, the Virtual School and other council services to improve outcomes for care experienced young people. While the impact of this has been difficult to assess due to the impact of Covid 19, there is evidence that outcomes are steadily improving. There continues to be strong performance in terms of the number of young people progressing to Higher Education, 51 presently, and returning to education and training following a period of not being in Education, Training or Employment. The engagement of Unaccompanied and Separated Children and Young People continues to be a strength.

<b>Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training (EET) rates, as of 31.3.2020 (Aged 19, 20 and 21)</b>				
	<b>Islington</b>	<b>Stat Neighbours</b>	<b>Inner London</b>	<b>England</b>
<b>Total % in EET</b>	47.8% (46.2% in 2018/19)	57.7%	58%	52%
<b>Total % not in EET</b>	42.3% (43.6% in 2018/19)	34.5%	34%	39%
<b>Local authority does not have information</b>	9.9% (10.2% in 2018/19)	7.8%	8%	9%

There is clear focus among Social Workers and Personal Advisers of the need not only to raise the aspirations of young people but also to provide effective information, advice and guidance to their

young people and this is being reflected in their direct work and Pathway Plans. The work of the Virtual School's Education, Employment and Training Advisers has become more targeted and focussed since the introduction of Education, Employment and Training Action Plans. Joint working between the Virtual School and Independent Futures is strong. There are examples of creative work across the council and its partners. This work includes the setting up of Youth, Employability and Skills Team (YES), the development of work experience and internships schemes and the collaboration between council, employers and partners, such as Go Forward, Spear, Big House and Arsenal in the Community.

Nevertheless, improving outcomes and reaching our target of 70% of young people being in education, employment and training will continue to be a challenge and will be particularly so over the coming months due to the impact of Covid 19. As noted in other reports presented at CPB, research and practice shows that the low outcomes of care experienced young people is the result of a range of factors. These include the impact of low attainment at the end of KS4, the number of children who enter care in later childhood, the social, emotional and mental health difficulties experienced by many young people as result of their trauma and adverse childhood experiences and the difficulties young people have in their transition to adulthood. While a great deal of positive and creative work is being undertaken moving and preparing young people for adulthood, it is clear that a proportion of young people find living independently a challenge and lack the consistent and appropriate support to sustain positive change. Evidence would indicate that in order for this change to occur there needs to be targeted, intensive and bespoke interventions by a range of services and professionals.

#### **Key Priorities for the academic year 2020-2021 for the Virtual School & College**

- Working together to develop a clearer understanding of what impacts on outcomes.
- Working collaboratively and intensively with Social Workers to address the issues of placement and school stability.
- Analyse and improve how the Pupil Premium Grant and other interventions can be used to improve the attainment, progress and the well-being of looked-after children. In particular, those groups of children and young people where outcomes are much lower, including Black and Minority Ethnic children and young people.
- Develop programmes of work to improve the outcomes for care experienced young people.
- Develop the role of the Virtual School to provide a service to Children in Need and previously looked-after children.

### **13) Independent Futures**

There is a strong commitment to care experienced young people in Islington by Council Members and Senior Leaders. This is reflected in our offer to them and our charter for care experienced young people, which is ambitious and steers the Council to think about its lifelong responsibilities. The service provided by Independent Futures for young people continues to develop and improve, going from strength to strength.

Staff have embraced the restructure changes, welcomed and settled in lots of new practitioners into the service, which has expanded considerably. Staff have continued to learn new skills and remain very committed to offering an excellent service to our children and young people.

Staff know their young people well and continue to maintain a high level of contact with them. Staff also maintain contact with some unseen young people who make contact with the service as needed beyond the age of 25 years old. Independent Futures consistently maintain contact with the majority of young people in the service:

Caseloads for the service have remained on the higher end. These high numbers are partly due to the unexpected influx of UASC who have presented over the past year. The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) is no longer operational meaning we have to hold on to all our presenting young people.

Many of our young people experience complex mental health difficulties though they do not meet the thresholds to access adult mental health services. This is due to the very high threshold of need required to access mental health support services from Adult Services and the fact that support cannot be accessed unless young people voluntarily engage with this. Unfortunately, due to their experiences of using and accessing help, this may not necessarily happen at that point and they only then access support in crisis. Therefore, the addition of two specialist mental health social worker roles alongside the two clinicians available to young people and staff to support their practice has been invaluable in bridging the gap to enable staff to effectively support young people around their emotional health needs. Group supervision is co-facilitated by practice managers and Clinicians in the team to support and the specialist social worker currently supports the whole service by offering consultation spaces and facilitating information sessions in our service meeting.

The service until March 2020 was holding late sessions on a Thursday evening for young people. Some of these sessions were well attended with the highest attendance being 18 young people who attended a cultural experience of world food and the lowest attendance has been one young person. The content of the sessions has been variable ranging from a sewing session, Bon Fire night (fireworks) session, Christmas sessions and World food experience. Some of our sessions were run alongside Grandmentors who run games or activity nights on a Thursday once a month to aid matching of young people with mentors.

Prior to the disruption caused by COVID the service was planning to look at how attendance could be improved and advertise them more across the building and with CAIS' support too.

Out of hours, telephone support continues in the evenings and at weekends where support and advice can be accessed.

The quality of pathway plans has improved and the consistency across the service is much better. However, the timeliness of completion remains an area of development for the whole service and plans are in place to address this. Pathway plans continue to be a challenge for the 16 and 17 year olds to ensure that the plans are completed in a timely manner as practice has tended to be that these young people have traditionally remained under Children Looked After systems and had CLA plans. The service is working with all relevant parties including, Independent Reviewing Officers to ensure that independence planning starts in earnest at 15.75 years and plans are drawn up by 16.25

years for most young people. We believe that focusing on this would improve education, employment and training outcomes for our children in the longer term.

### **Accommodation**

Our young people live in a variety of good quality accommodation including our House Project. Staying put is offered as standard where this is appropriate for young people in foster care. Some care experienced young people make the decision to go back and live with parents or relatives between the age of 16 and 18. Sometimes this is a very appropriate position for young people as the risk has changed. In other instances, this is not a good choice for the young person from our perspective and the services works with the young person to make the situation as safe as possible.

The service offers semi-independence accommodation for most late entrants into care and young people with the exception of UASC who usually live with foster carers as a first placement option. There is a small cohort of young people under the age of 18 who experience disruption of placement around their 16 or 17 birthday and feel unable to start again with a new family. These young people are likely to live in semi-independence accommodation. There are also young people over the age of 18 for whom as part of their journey into their own permanent accommodation live in semi-independence accommodation. In March 2020, the service had 99 young people in semi-independence accommodation. Most of these young people are placed within our internal pathway shared with Adult services and their accommodation is in either Islington, Camden or Hackney. For some young people due to safety or choice, they may not live locally and are placed out of our pathway further afield or near their family members or previous foster placements and this may be out of London.

Whilst the Semi-Independence pathway offers several benefits for some young people if this is developmentally appropriate for them the age range for these placements are 16-21 years and the capacity to offer effective interventions for young people is very variable with some providers who see the need as mainly accommodation and not holistically as a young people in need of care. Our staff have then to provide additional support to help meet their needs. We are doing some work with our contracted providers to try to address this and the rent costs for young people who are in semi-independence accommodation, which can be quite high, and impact on young people when they are seeking employment.

We continue to have a high level of young people in suitable accommodation. In Islington performance is affected by the percentage of young people in custody as they account for 7%.

<b>Care Experienced Accommodation rates, at 31.3.2020 (Aged 19, 20 and 21)</b>				
	<b>Islington</b>	<b>Stat Neighbours</b>	<b>Inner London</b>	<b>England</b>
<b>Accommodation considered suitable</b>	83%	86.0%	87%	85%
<b>Accommodation considered unsuitable</b>	7%	6.5%	6%	6%
<b>No information</b>	10%	7.5%	7%	9%

The practice of assessment and placement of young people in permanent accommodation remains high with less than 3 young people over the last 5 years losing their accommodation. Two of the losses have been due to criminality and one due to non-payment of rent arrears and abandonment of the accommodation by the young person. The rent arrears issue for care experienced young people remains a major area of work. Quite often as a parent would, we subsidise these payments but there is a need for some better triggers to prevent this occurring in the first place and escalating to court action. This is an area where more strategic work is required across the Council to ensure that we are keeping to our charter to care experienced young people to be their lifelong champion.

## **15) UASC**

There has been an increase in self-presenting Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) during 2019. In the third quarter of 2019 Islington was the third highest receiving local authority of UASC behind Croydon and Westminster.

Islington is currently significantly over our national 0.08% quota of 33 UASC. In December 2019 we had 65 Looked After UASC, making up 17% of the Children Looked After population in Islington this is a substantial increase from December 2018 where we had 34 Looked After UASC in our care.

Whilst Islington continues to participate in the equal distribution of UASC through the Pan London Rota and National Transfer Scheme (NTS) at present neither rota is working due to the high numbers of UASC across the UK and the prioritisation given to distributing Croydon UASC to other London Boroughs who are under their allocated 0.07 or 0.08% quotas. As such, Islington is expected to keep all new self-presenting UASC.

21% of our care experienced young people were formerly UASC. 28% of our former UASC still do not have a form of settled status in the UK and remain 'No Recourse to Public Funds'. With 75% of our Looked After UASC also without settled status, it is expected that more UASC will turn 18 and remain 'No Recourse to Public Funds' in 2020.

In 2019 Islington accepted 4 children under the Dubs s.67 scheme which identifies vulnerable children in refugee camps from across Europe whose needs cannot be met in these countries. Councillors have pledged to take 10 children per year under this scheme for the next 10 years with central government funding.

The needs of our UASC population have increased significantly in the past 12 months, in line with increasing accounts of trauma from UASC travelling via Libya where they often faced detention, torture, exposure to sexual assault and denial of food and sanitary conditions. In light of this, we have seen an increase in latent Tuberculosis, torture injuries, sexual assaults and Post Traumatic Stress diagnosis. We have also seen an increase in psychosomatic illnesses believed to be linked to trauma and mental health.

In 2019 Independent Futures became a 16 plus service and is now responsible for providing services to all UASC over the age of 16. This has required additional training and implementation of new procedures for frontline workers, complementing our Motivational Practice model.

There has been a significant increase in the number of National Referral Mechanism applications being completed for UASC, linked with the increase in modern slavery experiences of UASC on route to the UK.

#### **Key priorities for 2020-21 for Independent Futures**

- 1) Continue to improve the Education, employment and training opportunities for young people.
- 2) Review mental health support for young people aged 18 plus including step down from Tier 4 provision.
- 3) Review our care leavers offer considering feedback from the National Implementation Advisor for Care leavers' second report – the decade of the care leaver.
- 4) Increase participation of young people to improve service delivery.
- 5) Continue to improve our in-touch data. This already compares favourably with other local authorities but hope to be able to reach more young people
- 6) Improve the timeliness of pathway plans.
- 7) Take forward outcomes of the transformation work with UASC.

#### **16) Custodial Remand and Remand to Local Authority Accommodation**

An analysis was completed for CPB on two key ways in which a child who is looked after comes to the attention of the Youth Offending Service:

1. The children who were remanded either into Local Authority care or into custody (which means that they become looked after children for the period of their remand)
2. Children Looked After for more than a year who have been convicted of an offence whilst in our care

Overall, for Islington's children the offence gravity for the young people the Youth Offending Service works with is reducing as is the number of offences committed.

There has been a reduction in the number of times children were remanded into custody from 21, in the period 2018-19 to 7 and this is positive as we want this to be a last resort for children. Where remand into custody was used it was due to the serious nature of the offences that were alleged to have been committed or that other forms of community intervention had been unsuccessful in the Court's view.

Of the children made subject to remand, those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups (BAME) were significantly over represented, this is a cause for concern and is being addressed both locally and nationally.

### **Offending Rates for (Children Looked After)**

The percentage of children looked after for more than a year who were convicted or subject to a final warning or reprimand during the year was 5% a decrease from 6% in 2018/19. The average for our statistical neighbours was 6%.

10 children who had been looked after by the Local Authority for more than a year were convicted of offences between April 2019 - March 2020. All of them were males aged 14-17 years old.

It is concerning that there has been an increase this year in the number of 14 year olds being convicted of offences (4 this year compared to 1 last year.) These 10 children are in a range of placements and all of them have experienced some placement instability. They have all been offered multi-agency packages of support to try to meet their needs and support them away from offending.

6 children came into our care as a result of concerns about the risks to them posed by gang violence and criminality, as well as concerns about their parents' ability to keep them safe. Unfortunately, despite a range of services and interventions offered to them once they came into our care, concerns continued in these areas, and they continued to be convicted of criminal offences.

Disproportionality continues to be of concern, both in terms of children who are BAME being over-represented in the children that we look after in general, and represented in even higher numbers in terms of children who are long term looked after and have offended.

Islington YOS, CLA and IF continue to advocate for avoiding criminalising children in our care wherever possible. The 10 children were involved in 14 offences and received a wide range of outcomes for these, with two children receiving custodial sentences (which YOS very rarely recommend as an outcome for children but recognise is an option open to the Court).

This year, the actual sentences given by the Courts were all considered to be proportionate when reviewed by the YOS and CLA Service Managers, given the nature of the offences. This is positive progress and shows that the work by the services this year in trying to avoid criminalising our looked after children unnecessarily, and advocating for Out of Court disposals wherever possible is progressing positively.

### **Key priorities 2020-2021**

- 1) Address disproportionality of Black and Black British children within the children looked after population, the remand population and the children who are looked after and offend population. This will be done through joint audits, the adolescent review, and implementation of the recommendations from the evaluation report undertaken by the Centre for City Criminology.

- 2) Consideration of use of external controls such as GPS monitoring as a direct alternative to custody in addition to utilising Intensive Supervision and Surveillance
- 3) Continued participation in the Pan London protocol for reducing criminalisation of Looked After Children by the YOS and CLA Service Manager, with the aim of working with the police, placements service and other agencies to ensure all placements understand our commitment to this.

### **Conclusion**

In Islington our commitment is to provide an excellent trauma informed service that is proactive and responsive to changing needs and works to support our children and young people to achieve their full potential.

This annual report of the Corporate Parenting Board has summarised practice across the service, which has been scrutinised by the Board during 2019/20. It also highlights areas of development for 2021. Our Plan for Children looked after and Care Leavers 2018-2020 sets out what we have achieved in the last two years. We will ensure that changes are sustained and built on. Our plan for 2020-22 will be presented for scrutiny at CPB in May 2021.

Karen Gibbings

31 December 2020