



Waltham Forest

Annual Report 2024 – 2025

Corporate Parenting Board



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Introduction

Message from Councillor Kizzy Gardiner, Chair and Lead Member for Children and Families

As I reflect on my second year as Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB), I continue to feel honoured to work alongside inspiring young people, dedicated professionals, and committed carers. Our shared responsibility as corporate parents, to secure the best possible outcomes for children and young people, remains one of the most significant roles we hold.

The Board's purpose is to celebrate what's working well and to shine a light on areas where improvements are needed. When challenges arise, we dig deep, asking questions to truly understand the issues at hand and to identify what changes are necessary. Our ongoing mission is to ensure every child and every family has the support and opportunities they need to flourish and to live safe, healthy lives.

It has been a pleasure to have Blessing as co-Chair over the past year. Her enthusiasm and commitment have brought fresh ideas to the Board. Working together, we have been able to strengthen our focus on what matters most to children and young people, ensuring their voices are central to every decision we make.

With young people actively shaping our Board's work, we are continually reminded to listen, learn, and act with their best interests at heart.



Outgoing message from Blessing, outgoing Co-Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board

I have been co-chair of CPB for the past year. During this I have grown in confidence and had experiences that I didn't think I would have, like a personal trip to meet with Calvin Bailey MP in the secret tunnels of House of Commons.

I think that the board is so important that I have prioritised being there over lots of other things, like the last meeting when I finished off my maths GCSE revision whilst also chairing the board.

I want to encourage as many other young people to come along to express their opinions on such an important area of our lives. We can't let people make decisions about our lives without better understanding of our experiences and hearing our views.

Purpose of this report

This annual report highlights the activities and discussions from the Corporate Parenting Board meetings held between April 2024 and March 2025. It outlines how the Board has overseen and scrutinised the services delivered by the Council and its partners for our care experienced children, ensuring that those in our care remain safe, well-supported, and have every chance to thrive.

The report is published alongside the 2024/25 Corporate Parenting Strategy, and it is advised that both documents are reviewed together for a comprehensive understanding.

Role of the Corporate Parenting Board

The Corporate Parenting Board's role is to ensure the council, and its partners commit to excellent standards of corporate parenting, deliver the Pledge to Children in Care, and develop and carry out the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

Corporate Parenting Meetings – 'what went down'

Six Corporate Parenting Board meetings took place in 2024-25 covering a range of key themes, looking at performance across all services and appropriate challenges made for areas requiring improvement (Please see next page).



Date

Meeting Topics

09.07.2024

Hearing from young people
Pathway Plans update
Hearing from the Independent Reviewing Officers
University of Liverpool research item
Care leavers as a protected characteristic update
Reviewed Housing Agreement: Accommodation options for care leavers
Health Update
Performance Indicator Dashboard
Pupil Premium Update

04.09.2024

Hearing from young people
Hearing from the Independent Reviewing Officers
Performance Indicator Dashboard
Health Update
Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2023-24
Leaving Care Annual Report 2023-24
Coram RAA Annual Report 2023-24
Adoption and Fostering Panels Annual Reports 2023-24
AOB

13.11.2024

Hearing from young people
Hearing from the Independent Reviewing Officers
Sufficiency Strategy
Placement Stability Support Update
Virtual School Annual Report 2023/24
Health Update
Looked-After Children's Health Annual Report 2023/24

15.01.25

Hearing from young people
Hearing from Independent Reviewing Officers
Performance Dashboard
Health Update
Looked After Children Health Annual Report 2023/24
Voice and Influence Annual Report 2023/24
Foster Carer Recruitment Update

18.03.25

LAC performance indicators update
Pan London Care Leavers Compact - Family Business Model
Looked After Children Care Leavers Quality Improvement Strategy
Ice breaker
Activities set by the young people

14.05.25

Update on The Hub
Hearing from young people
Hearing from Independent Reviewing Officers
LAC Performance Indicators Dashboard update
Health Update
Feedback from the March 2025 CPB 'Young Person Takeover'
AOB

What Children and Young People Have Told Us

Everything we do as a Corporate Parenting Board is shaped by the voices and experiences of our children and young people. Their feedback is central to this report and directly influences how we develop our services and responsibilities as corporate parents. By listening and responding, we strive to ensure every child feels supported, heard, and empowered to thrive.

"My social worker has gone above and beyond to support me with my rent and utility bill arrears, giving me emotional reassurance as well as helping me with referrals."

Recognising Commitment and Care

"My social worker has made me feel safe and comfortable to talk about vulnerable things... she made me feel very comfortable and comforted"

Feeling Safe and Supported

"My social worker always encourages me and speaks life into me"

Feeling Safe and Supported

"I think she should take me out to the park and Costa. She has never taken me out!"

Ways to Improve Going Forward

"My social worker makes me feel heard in the meetings."

Being Listened to and Included

"I really appreciate the support, but one area they could improve is communication. Sometimes key updates or opportunities didn't reach everyone in time, and a more consistent or centralised communication channel would help keep us all informed and

Ways to Improve Going Forward

We are grateful to every young person who has shared their experiences with us. Your voices continue to shape our priorities and drive positive change across our services.

Our Priorities – Corporate Parenting Strategy

Our goal is to make sure that all services under Corporate Parenting prioritise these five key areas at the heart of their work, guaranteeing the best opportunities for children in care and care-experienced individuals. By doing so, along with regular meetings, the Corporate Parenting Board can hold our services accountable, ensuring that the council and its partners uphold the highest standards of corporate parenting.



Independence and Preparation for the Future:

We believe in our young people, and we are ambitious about what they can achieve. We are committed to supporting them as they transition into adulthood and gain independence.

Health and Wellbeing:

We want to improve our children and young people's overall wellbeing, and help them get healthier, mentally, and physically so that we can better support them.

Identity and Belonging:

The experiences of children and young people are the most important part of how we design our services. We want to listen to what they have to say and for them to feel more connected, empowered, and supported.

Education and Employment:

We want to help children and young people become more empowered, skilled, and confident so that they are ready to achieve their goals and ambitions.

Safety and Stability:

We want to create a safer, more stable, and supportive living environment for our children and young people, improving their overall well-being and trust in the system.



Highlights from Corporate Parenting Board Meetings

Corporate Parenting comprises a range of different services working together to deliver the best possible care and support to our children. During Corporate Parenting Board meetings, key themes are identified and reviewed. This section offers an overview of what was discussed at each of these meetings, with a particular focus on the board's effectiveness in holding service managers to account and ensuring that children in care and care-experienced individuals are considered at every stage.

Corporate Parenting Board Meeting 1 09.07.2024

An overview of key topics discussed by the Board and the approach taken by members in their scrutiny.

Hearing from young people

There were positive reports from young people, such as:

- The Hub has offered trips and a space for young people to meet and settle.
- Supportive relationships between social workers and young people, helping them transition between homes, setting up Universal Credit, and supporting young people whose English is not their first language.
- Positive relationships between therapists and young people, helping young people settle into care.
- Blessing highlighted the support from the Voice and Influence team, and the benefit of meeting other young people to share experiences.

Kizzy thanked everyone for sharing their experiences, demonstrating the Board's commitment to hearing directly from young people and ensuring their voices inform service development.

Hearing from Independent Reviewing Officers

The Board was updated on care and transition planning for care leavers, such as:

- IROs challenge any unsuitable arrangements and ensure care leavers receive the right quality of home.
- Most plans were deemed good, with leaving care coaches demonstrating strong expertise, and social workers attending the appropriate panels.
- IROs are focusing on those needing therapeutic support and ensuring smoother transitions.
- Good examples were noted in sharing experiences and passing on information to young people.
- A query was raised about the number of children in supported accommodation settings. It was confirmed that one application had been received, but the process had been slow.

Kizzy highlighted that young people appreciate meeting their Leaving Care Coach (LCC) early, and Joy confirmed that most are introduced before their eighteenth birthday, though there is a push for this to happen sooner. IROs are also ensuring that young people have access to the full range of services, including life skills workshops.

The transition plan has been reviewed over the last four months, with a focus on starting the

process when a child reaches seventeen. There is also consideration of inviting young people to workshops earlier if they wish.

An update on the new Hub was requested, with the board noting a delay in the design process and promising further updates at the next meeting.

University of Liverpool Research

Sally from the University of Liverpool presented research on the lived experiences of care-experienced young people. Emerging themes highlighted the complexity of care and the importance of long-term supportive relationships. The Board reflected on how this research informs practice and the need for ongoing engagement with young people.

Care Leavers as a Protected Characteristic

There is a collaborative, multi-agency approach to supporting care-experienced young people, such as:

- Transition panels have been reviewed to ensure all partners are involved, covering education and accommodation needs.
- A multi-agency steering group for care leavers has been established to improve data sharing and explore voluntary sector support.
- Officers are working closely with services for 18-25-year-olds, and Change Grow Live services are now provided at The Hub.
- A peer-led mental health support group, supported by CAMHS, has been set up.
- Probation support is available for young people transitioning back into the community, and panels support those not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- A benefits advisor and skills development support from Centrepont are also available.

Scrutiny

At the meeting board members scrutinised officers across key themes relevant to the care and outcomes of young people, focusing on accountability, service transitions, data clarity, and systemic improvements. The key areas of scrutiny are summarised below:

1. Transitions into Adulthood

- Board members, notably Chair Kizzy Gardiner, challenged the timeliness of introducing Leaving Care Coaches (LCCs) to young people, suggesting earlier engagement. Officers agreed improvements were needed, with plans to start the process at age 17 or earlier.

2. Accuracy and Oversight of Placements

- Daniel Phelps questioned whether **no** young people were in unregulated accommodation, prompting clarification from officers that one such placement process had been delayed.

3. Challenge to Housing Decisions

- Board members scrutinised the classification of care leavers as “intentionally homeless.” Officers confirmed this practice now required joint sign-off by Directors of Housing and Children’s Social Care.

4. Addressing Discrimination

- In response to questions from both Hanan and Rhiannon Eglin, officers outlined how care-experienced young people were supported in accessing jobs and education, with formal complaints procedures in place for discrimination.

5. Performance Data & Reporting Integrity

- Questions were raised over:
 - A misleading performance indicator showing 89% of care leavers in

suitable accommodation, revealing it was a cumulative figure.

- Absence data affected by Year 11 study leave.
- The approval timeline for foster carers, with delays tied to medical checks; officers promised a six-month update.

6. Pathway Plans & Process Improvement

- Louise Mitchell suggested all Board members review a blank pathway plan to better understand the support process for care leavers.

7. University Research & Reflective Challenge

- Members engaged with Liverpool University researchers sharing lived experiences of care-experienced youth. Officers and councillors reflected on systemic shortcomings, including limited boundaries and humanising language.

Throughout the meeting, officers were held to account for improving transparency, enhancing care transitions, refining data reporting, and addressing systemic inequalities affecting care-experienced young people.

Corporate Parenting Board Meeting 2 04.09.2024

An overview of key topics discussed by the Board and the approach taken by members in their scrutiny.

Hearing from Young People

There were valuable contributions from young people, including:

- Young people reflected on the University of Liverpool presentation at the previous meeting and found the issues raised, such as end-of-life care for care-experienced individuals, deeply relatable.
- Work is underway to create a new starter information pack for all children entering council care, providing clarity on structure and key staff contacts; the pack will be brought to the Board when ready.
- Reports of a key worker providing support with living arrangements, learning to cook, budgeting, and being a listening ear for concerns.
- Blessing and Casey's facilitation highlighted the Board's ongoing commitment to centring young people's voices in scrutinising and developing support.

Performance Indicator Dashboard

Key monitoring points included:

- The Board reviewed indicators, noting an increase in children placed over 20 miles from the borough, but this was consistent with national figures and sometimes reflected safer options for the young person.
- A sufficiency strategy and extension of the semi-independence framework are in place to increase local placement capacity, despite provider challenges.

- Transfers between placements remain high; OFSTED recommended starting transition processes earlier. Officers are exploring ways to manage workforce pressures.
- The Board will verify data accuracy, ensure alignment between the annual report and health partners, and address discrepancies.
- The OC12 indicator (children looked after for a year but absent from school) improved, though study leave affected results.
- Workloads for leaving care coaches remain high; benchmarking will take place to compare with other boroughs, and the Board acknowledged financial constraints on hiring but is exploring innovations.
- OC7a, the 'Strength and Difficulty' survey participation, is being tracked as a cumulative figure. Data quality on substance misuse is improving. The current figure for young people in custody is 22.

Health Update

In reviewing health outcomes:

- Local authority data is cumulative and accurate; ongoing efforts ensure timely and thorough health assessments, with nine clinics conducted over the summer.
- Flexibility is maintained for appointments, with home visits used as a last resort.
- A developing operational dashboard will allow real-time tracking of assessments and delays, supporting the broader performance dashboard.
- Delays can result from parental consent issues or court processes.
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) receive specialised infectious disease screening via a dedicated tracker.

Specialist clinics include mental health support.

- Themes noted: sleep issues, emotional wellbeing after discharge, and the impact of missed early education (linked to Covid-19).
- The Board was updated on a recent after-action review concerning a lengthy A+E stay, and will receive further updates, along with outcomes from early recommendations being discussed nationally.
- The Board aims to keep reviewing emerging health and emotional well-being themes affecting children and young people in care.

Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2023-24

- The Annual Report now focuses on key service themes, outcomes, and improvements and links to all relevant annual reports.
- "Promise for our YP" is included, showcasing last year's achievements and upcoming priorities.
- Young people's priorities are embedded in meeting themes. The names of any young people who died during the year will be included.
- The "Becoming Independent" priority was reviewed in light of OFSTED's call for more apprenticeship opportunities. Efforts to expand these are ongoing.
- The report was compiled collaboratively with thanks given to all contributors.

Leaving Care Annual Report 2023-24

- The report outlined key achievements, including free prescriptions, mental health support, a joint housing protocol update, and TfL travel discounts for care leavers.

- The Board recognised the significant effort behind these achievements and discussed what support remains available for care leavers beyond age 25, noting ongoing guidance and further support for those who struggle with independence.
- Officers are seeking to expand apprenticeship and employment opportunities via Corporate Development, HR, other council services, and Communications.
- Twenty young people participated in the recent elections, and Board members are encouraged to engage in Care Leavers Week events.

Coram RAA Annual Report 2023-24

- The report highlighted service stability, recruitment of a new manager, and six adoptions in the past year.
- The Board discussed the council's policy on contact with birth parents, the practical and emotional support available, and the importance of safe, digitally enabled contact.
- Open adoption principles are being promoted; adoption allowance, emotional, and psychological support are available, supplemented by the Government's adoption support fund.
- Waltham Forest remains a leading authority both for the number of adopters and those who require additional support. Procedures for disruptions in adoption placements were clarified.

Adoption and Fostering Panels Annual Reports 2023-24

- Seven new foster carers were approved, alongside efforts for more long-term foster matches and compliance with review timescales, despite a nationally high turnover of social workers.

- Ethnicity trends in adoption and fostering were discussed. Participation in initiatives like Black Adoption aims to address representation gaps.
- Four additional foster carers were approved, with six more in assessment.
- Foster carer retention and the national minimum standards for notifications were reviewed. The council is increasing support for private, and kinship foster carers and exploring new community fostering projects.
- The year's two focus areas: recruitment and supporting carers with children's additional needs; these will be revisited at future meetings.

Scrutiny

At the meeting, board members scrutinised officers primarily through targeted questioning, requests for clarification, and suggestions for improving both policy and practice. The main areas of scrutiny included:

1. Performance and Data Accuracy:

- Members, especially Tim, queried the rise in the number of children placed over 20 miles away and the sufficiency strategy to increase local capacity. Officers stated this was sometimes necessary for safety and that a new framework should improve local availability; they also agreed scrutiny of transfer volumes and earlier transitions was necessary.
- Clarification was sought on performance indicator methodologies (e.g. cumulative versus point-in-time data), accuracy of substance misuse figures, and how study leave impacted the reporting of school absences. Officers acknowledged recording errors and ongoing improvement efforts, including dashboards to track

health assessment timeliness and outcomes.

2. **Caseloads and Resource Challenges:**

- Louise asked about leaving care coaches' workloads compared to other boroughs. Officers admitted workloads were high and were awaiting benchmarking data, citing finance-driven limits but expressing commitment to finding creative solutions.

3. **Service Delivery and Response to OFSTED:**

- The Board acknowledged the 'Good' OFSTED rating and discussed the pressure on workforce capacity noted by inspectors. Officers agreed transition planning required strengthening and outlined ongoing work to address OFSTED recommendations, such as expanding apprenticeship options for care leavers.

4. **Health and Wellbeing Oversight:**

- Multiple questions were put to officers about delays in health assessments, communication failures between health and social work teams, and improvements for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Officers addressed improvements in clinic arrangements, tracking systems, and communications around delays, and provided updates on after-action reviews following specific incidents (e.g., A&E admissions).

5. **Adoption and Fostering Scrutiny:**

- Board members reviewed reports on adoption and fostering approvals, the impact of high social worker turnover, and demographic patterns in placements. Members questioned the

equality of outcomes in adoption/fostering across ethnic groups and discussed efforts to increase diversity, such as involvement in "Black Adoption" initiatives.

- Cost-of-living impacts on adoption numbers and available support were discussed, with officers clarifying what support could be offered by the Council or Coram, and reporting on use of government adoption support funds.

6. **Policy and Practice Improvements:**

- Detailed questions were asked about the process for maintaining relationships with birth parents and siblings after adoption, reflecting Board concerns about the impacts of evolving contact methods (e.g., social media) and the adaptability of policy to young people's needs.
- Requests for future updates and reports were made by Board members for new staff information packs, health issues (e.g., sleep patterns, emotional wellbeing), and themed meetings.

Throughout the meeting, officers' responses indicated ongoing efforts to address Board scrutiny—through targeted data work, service reviews, routine auditing, and adoption of best practice innovations. The Board's challenge was clear and constructive, maintaining high standards for outcomes and transparency.

Corporate Parenting Board Meeting 3 13.11.2024

An overview of key topics discussed by the Board and the approach taken by members in their scrutiny.

Hearing from Young People

The discussion focused on mental health, with young people sharing statements from their peers to highlight key concerns and suggestions:

- Calls were made for a safe, soundproof space at the Hub where young people can talk privately.
- Concerns were raised about the loss of access to trusted school counsellors; suggestions included offering alternative trusted adults in schools.
- Young people discussed difficulties trusting professionals and proposed ideas such as access to “rage rooms”. More education on managing emotions was also suggested as an alternative.
- One young person shared their experience of being unjustly held in police custody and the challenges of transitioning to foster care after living with their birth family.
- There were requests for more life skills support, including help with budgeting and handling laundry.

It was highlighted that while form tutors might not be equipped to deliver therapy, their support in recognising mental health needs is valuable. Officers will explore skills development further in foster carer forums, with young people possibly attending to share their experiences.

Work is ongoing to refresh the handbook-style “My Guide” resource, with a focus on making it interactive and shaped by young people.

Alternatives to “rage rooms”, such as gym access or sports, were discussed. It was also noted that

not all young people benefit from physical activity-based outlets—some may benefit more from emotional education and building meaningful relationships.

Hearing from Independent Reviewing Officers

Positive feedback was shared regarding improvements in health assessments:

- Health reports are being completed in a timely manner and are proving helpful for care planning and reviews.
- Clear actions and improved access to health services, especially dental appointments, were noted.
- A consistent approach has been taken, with young people being seen by the same nurse wherever possible.

Sufficiency Strategy

An update was provided on the strategy to ensure local placement provision matches children’s needs. Key points included:

- There are plans to engage young people in reviewing the strategy to ensure it reflects their needs.
- Discussions are underway regarding repurposing council-owned housing into semi-independent provision. Officers are reviewing financial viability and learning from other local authorities.
- Supported living options – including arrangements for young people living with extended family (rather than formal foster placements) – are being considered, with appropriate assessments in place.
- Officers are looking into national best practice models for inspiration.

The impact of increasing complex needs placements on the budget was discussed. It was confirmed that additional funding is attached to the needs of the child, not the foster carer.

Work has started to place children leaving specialist provisions into families with appropriate support. Dialogue continues around long-term foster care funding, including projects still requiring matched funding.

'Staying Put' arrangements remain in place as a key post-18 option for those settled with their foster families.

Updates on national initiatives, such as the kinship care pilot and regional care cooperatives, are pending. Any future accommodation plans should be developed in partnership with young people.

Placement Stability and Out-of-Borough Support

An update was given on children placed outside the borough:

- Most out-of-borough placements are stable and rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding', with only two awaiting updated Ofsted grading.
- Officers aim to maintain high standards and ensure young people placed further afield receive the same level of care and support.
- Cultural sensitivity and identity preservation remain key, particularly for Black and Asian young people placed outside London.
- Young people's views are taken into account where possible, though safety and court-ordered placements may override choice.
- Family contact and transport for visits are supported when appropriate.

Virtual School Annual Report 2023/24

The Virtual School highlighted key progress points:

- Despite a national decline in GCSE outcomes, local progress scores

improved, and more young people are staying in education through Year 13.

- Some care leavers, including those with EHCPs, progressed to university with the right support in place.
- Priorities for the coming year include educational inclusion, access to high-quality learning, and improved emotional wellbeing.

The Board discussed ways to raise aspirations:

- The Virtual School approach remains personalised, based on each young person's education plan.
- Opportunities for creative and vocational pathways – including art, business, and practical careers like hairdressing – are being supported.
- Officers are also engaging with local universities and regional career strategy groups to enhance guidance.
- It was emphasised that aspirations should be realistic and empowering, with supportive relationships at the heart of success.

It was agreed that a revised target for "persistent absence" in the performance dashboard would align Waltham Forest with the top quarter of London boroughs.

Health Update

The Board received a general update on staffing, services, and mental health provision:

- Therapeutic parenting training is being extended to all foster carers, including those within Mockingbird constellations.
- Clinical mental health services are currently stable, with a waiting time of 4–6 weeks. Continued monitoring was encouraged to ensure this remains manageable.

Looked-After Children's Health Report – Preview

An overview of the upcoming full report was shared:

- Health assessments are being adapted to meet the evolving needs of older children, including focus on hygiene, budgeting, and other life skills.
- Complex health needs are being identified early and supported accordingly.
- The full discussion will take place once the complete report is presented at a future meeting.

After Action Review (Any Other Business)

An update was provided on a recent case involving a young person who experienced a prolonged delay in A&E due to complex needs:

Fourteen recommendations have been made, and a framework is being developed to implement improvements.

A full progress report will be shared at the next Board meeting.

Scrutiny

At the meeting, board members scrutinised officers across key themes relevant to the care and outcomes of young people, focusing on strategic implementation, educational outcomes, placement quality, and service accountability. The key areas of scrutiny are summarised below:

1. Sufficiency Strategy Implementation

- Louise Mitchell challenged officers on the practical mechanics of repurposing council housing stock into semi-independent provision, demanding specifics about financial viability. Officers referenced similar initiatives by Barnardos and Greenwich Borough.
- Tim James questioned budget implications of foster carers taking on more complex

cases. Officers confirmed additional allowances were attached to the child rather than foster care status.

- Kizzy Gardiner (Chair) probed the funding status of the foster hub, with officers confirming it remained funded to an extent but now required match funding for bids.

2. Young People's Voice in Decision-Making

- Faith (CiCC member) insisted supported accommodation arrangements should be co-produced with the voice and influence team, challenging officers to ensure meaningful youth participation.
- Faith questioned whether young people placed outside the borough had any say in placements that might impact them. Officers confirmed this depended on circumstances, with planned placements involving consultation but safety remaining the priority.

3. Educational Performance and Aspirations

- Richard Sweden demanded specifics about how the virtual school could exceed national norms. Officers explained that scale, length of time in care, and consistency of support were key factors.
- Louise Mitchell challenged officers on how care-experienced young people could be inspired further. Officers outlined individualised approaches through personal education plans (PEPs) and university connections.
- Tim James questioned the effectiveness of the University of Portsmouth partnership. Officers confirmed limited engagement due to narrow subject range but were working on accreditation for care-experienced support.

4. Service Quality and Monitoring

- Richard Sweden emphasized continuous monitoring of clinical services waiting times (currently 4-6 weeks), warning that performance needed ongoing oversight to prevent deterioration.
- Louise Mitchell probed transition planning for young people transitioning to adulthood. Officers confirmed assessments looked at independent skills including hygiene and budgeting.

Throughout the meeting, officers were held to account for delivering concrete improvements in placement quality, educational outcomes, strategic implementation, and ensuring young people's voices remained central to decision-making processes.

5. Placement and Support Quality

- Board members scrutinised cultural sensitivities for Black and Asian children placed outside London, with officers confirming this was being actively addressed.
- Officers confirmed all children placed outside the borough had access to independent reviewing officers and were in 'Good' or 'Outstanding' rated placements, with only two awaiting OFSTED ratings.
- Following young people's feedback about needing independent living skills (laundry, budgeting), officers agreed to raise this at the next foster carer forum.

6. Performance Data Clarity

- Kizzy Gardiner scrutinised the proposed change to persistent absence figures in the performance dashboard. Officers explained this would put the Virtual School in the top quarter of London performance, and the Board agreed the change.

7. After Action Review Accountability

- Daniel Phelps provided updates on the After Action Review following a child spending too long in accident and emergency, with 14 recommendations made and a framework being developed for future management.

Corporate Parenting Board Meeting 4 15.01.2025

An overview of key topics discussed by the Board and the approach taken by members in their scrutiny.

Hearing from Young People

The topic brought forward by young people centred on mental health.

- A statement was shared describing a young person's experience of suicidal feelings, racism, bullying around weight, and teachers dismissing concerns. The young person had been refused treatment in hospital, which added to their distress.
- Young people expressed the need for access to trained mental health professionals, safe spaces, and more opportunities for cultural understanding and support, including bereavement groups.
- Suggestions were made for peer-to-peer support groups, increased youth mental health first aid training for professionals, and more accountability when concerns are dismissed.
- Officers confirmed that therapeutic support had been provided where needed, and that a range of training courses were available for staff. These will now be reviewed to improve access and coverage.
- Drop-in mental health support is available at the Hub for 18–25-year-olds, and there are plans to develop a peer-support network.
- It was suggested that greater training is needed to tackle underlying stereotypes and to enable professionals to better support children with complex needs and trauma.
- Officers will explore the idea of a 'grief café' and review how young people's experiences are shared with professionals to improve empathy and support.

Hearing from Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)

A summary was provided relating to three national reports on the mental health of care-experienced children.

- Key themes were highlighted: the importance of listening to children, ensuring engagement, offering stable homes, responding to trauma, and preparing for adulthood.
- Service improvements include CAMHS providing assessments within four weeks, with clear referral pathways.
- Concerns remain over pre-assessment delays, particularly for young people turning to risky behaviours like smoking or drinking to cope.
- It was suggested that support services could be linked to group activities rather than traditional one-to-ones to increase engagement and reduce stigma.

Performance Dashboard

The Board reviewed performance data, including the timeliness of health assessments. While performance was improving, it was noted that some young people—particularly unaccompanied asylum-seeking children—follow different processes, which can cause delays.

An increase in foster carers was highlighted, although the approval process has sometimes been delayed due to personal circumstances of applicants.

Health Update

- Improvements in staff continuity were noted, and officers meet regularly with CAMHS to review any service delays. While no major blockages were reported,

there remain challenges in accessing therapeutic appointments.

- A medical advisor role has been introduced to support smoother foster carer recruitment and reduce assessment delays for family and friends' carers.
- There was discussion around better understanding the current needs of children in care, with a call for reports to reflect real-time strategies and youth input.
- Priorities for the coming year include improving access to GPs and dentists, enhancing mental health and emotional wellbeing support, and providing better support during transitions into adulthood.

Voice and Influence Annual Report 2023/24

- Over 500 surveys and 100 staff appraisals were received, with increasing engagement from young people in Board meetings, particularly through "takeover" sessions.
- Two young people have successfully moved into their own homes and shared their experiences.
- A new offer of baby boxes for care-experienced parents is being implemented, with officers following up to ensure transparency around support groups and entitlements.
- Officers will explore stronger links between parent groups and local Family Hubs. There was also recognition that young people often aren't clear on staff roles or how to engage with services unless they have direct interaction.

Board members were encouraged to review findings related to mental health closely.

Foster Carer Recruitment Update

- Seven new foster carers have been approved, with more currently being assessed or involved in training.
- A regional recruitment hub, supported by the Department for Education (DfE), has been delayed in its rollout. While funding has been extended to March 2025, two partners have withdrawn due to co-funding requirements.
- Officers are working to ensure that the regional hub offers consistent services across boroughs, and maintain that potential carers haven't expressed concerns about borough-specific offers.

Scrutiny

Board members scrutinised officers across key themes relevant to the care and outcomes of young people, focusing on mental health support, service accountability, data performance, and strategic direction. The key areas of scrutiny are summarised below:

1. Mental Health Crisis Response and Training

- Marsela Berberi challenged officers on social worker training around mental health, asking for further ideas beyond current provision following serious concerns raised by young people about dismissed mental health crises.
- Faith (CiCC member) questioned vetting processes for social workers to identify potential stereotypes and demanded better training for working with children with complex needs and traumatic experiences.
- Officers confirmed a range of courses were offered but agreed to speak with training coordinators about improved accessibility.

2. Health Assessment Timeliness and Trauma Awareness

- Tim James scrutinised the number of health assessments completed within 28 days, emphasising that professionals needed to focus on improving this given young people's traumatic experiences.
- Officers confirmed assessments were tracked weekly with valid reasons required for non-attendance, though unaccompanied asylum-seeking children had different pathways causing potential delays.

3. Foster Carer Approval Process

- Kizzy Gardiner (Chair) questioned the increased time to approve new foster carers despite rising numbers. Officers explained one carer's illness had impacted the approval timeline.
- Hanan Al-Najjar challenged whether there had been resistance to ensuring the regional hub offered similar provision to Waltham Forest's previous arrangements. Officers confirmed focus on "one door" approach while respecting different borough offers.

4. Strategic Direction and Current Needs Assessment

- Daniel Phelps challenged officers on understanding current needs of young people and what services the council should consider commissioning, noting curiosity about present requirements.
- Kizzy Gardiner agreed, emphasising the importance of strategic level updates rather than historic reporting.
- Tim James noted that reports felt more historic rather than current, pushing for contemporary relevance.

- Richard Sweden emphasised ensuring consideration of young people was captured in service planning.

5. Service Integration and Accountability

- Louise Mitchell questioned the expected impact of the medical advisor role. Officers explained it addressed blockages in foster carer recruitment and supported families through approval processes.
- Kizzy Gardiner probed how baby and parent groups interacted with Family Hubs teams, with officers confirming they had representation but could strengthen interaction.

6. Young People's Access to Information

- Faith (CiCC member) highlighted that when reading the Leaving Care offer, she had not been informed of the parent group. Officers agreed to follow up with leaving care coaches.
- Kizzy Gardiner noted that many young people didn't know professional roles, with officers acknowledging difficulty in retention if young people didn't engage regularly.

7. Follow-up Accountability

Kizzy Gardiner demanded a three-month review of the after action review case involving a child spending too long in accident and emergency.

Officers confirmed the NEL ICB had begun a project on specialist provision for mental health and social needs, with the Board to revisit when proposals were ready.

Throughout the meeting, officers were held to account for improving mental health crisis response, enhancing training provision, delivering timely health assessments, and ensuring strategic planning reflected current rather than historic needs of care-experienced young people.

Corporate Parenting Board Meeting 5 18.03.2025

An overview of key topics discussed by the Board and the approach taken by members in their scrutiny.

Looked-After Children (LAC) Performance Indicators Update

- The Board reviewed current performance trends:
- A high level of persistent absence among looked-after children was noted. An update on how mental health support might improve attendance will be shared at a future meeting.
- The relaunch of the Mental Health Charter is being considered, including promoting it through the Parent and Carer Forum.
- Mental health ambassadors have recently commissioned the 'I Thrive' programme.
- National health targets were discussed, with thanks given to council and health officers for progress to date.

Pan-London Care Leavers Compact – Family Business Model

The Board reviewed a regional proposal that mirrors recognising care leavers as a protected characteristic:

- It aims to create employment pathways for care leavers by encouraging council departments, contractors, and traded services to offer opportunities.
- Officers confirmed in-work support is available, and positive responses have been received regarding apprenticeships.
- Suggestions included engaging the Mayor of London around Child Support Week and Care Leavers Week, and providing advance information for fostering campaigns.

Quality Improvement Strategy for Looked-After Children and Care Leavers

The Board received confirmation that the strategy has been ratified.

- Young people's feedback from across North East London shaped its development, with concerns raised around GP access, mental health services, waiting times, and fitness support.
- Free gym passes are being offered to young people. However, uptake remains a challenge. Officers clarified that consistent usage is necessary to justify the cost, and flexibility exists depending on location and individual need.

Young People-Led Interactive Activities

The session featured several creative engagement exercises led by young people:

1. Icebreaker – A music quiz created an inclusive, relaxed atmosphere.
2. Relationship Tower Building – Board members and practitioners built towers, each block labelled with a quality that either strengthens or weakens relationships between young people and professionals.

Examples of what builds trust:

- Following through on promises
- Showing care and listening
- Being honest and non-judgemental
- Providing guidance without being superior
- Being consistent, reliable, and respectful
- Having lived experience or showing empathy

Examples of actions that damage trust:

- Breaking promises
- Withholding information

- Being superior, disrespectful, or dishonest
- Failing to follow up or communicate
- Making excuses or undermining young people

3. Mental Health Roleplay – Young people demonstrated how practitioner meetings can feel from their perspective, emphasising the importance of empathy, openness, active listening, and respectful communication.

4. Mental Health Statement and Puzzle – A statement was read around the impact of mental health challenges. A word puzzle activity followed, designed to illustrate the diversity of individual experiences and the value of understanding context when working with young people.

Open Q&A with Young People

A live question and answer session allowed board members to hear directly from care-experienced young people:

When asked what professionals should do if a young person doesn't want to engage, the response focused on building trust through kindness, patience, and consistency.

On handling professionals leaving their roles, it was agreed that young people should be informed in advance, giving time for a proper goodbye and reducing any feelings of abandonment.

Concerns were raised about the lack of continuity, including not receiving birthday cards from social workers – something symbolic but important to young people.

Some worries were shared about becoming independent, such as learning to budget and manage bills. While some had support networks, not all had access to this through services.

When asked about their strengths, young people identified qualities such as empathy, organisation, independence, communication, and intelligence. The importance of professionals showing compassion was also emphasised.

Scrutiny

At the meeting board members scrutinised officers across key themes relevant to the care and outcomes of young people, focusing on educational performance, employment opportunities, service accessibility, and relationship building. The key areas of scrutiny are summarised below:

1. Educational Performance and Mental Health Support

- David Aizenberg acknowledged high levels of persistent absence amongst looked-after children and committed to providing a future update examining how mental health could be supported to address this issue.
- Chair Kizzy Gardiner noted the council was looking to relaunch the Mental Health Charter and aimed to raise this in the parent and carer forum.
- Tim James confirmed national targets with health partners and thanked them for improvements to health outcomes.

2. Employment and Training Opportunities

- Nicky Crouch challenged councillors to champion opportunities within traded services, contractors and other employment opportunities as part of the Pan London Care Leavers Compact.

3. Service Accessibility and Viability

- Louise Mitchell questioned whether free gym passes only applied to some leisure centres that could be further away from where young people lived.
- Kobus Grobbelaar confirmed that if there was something local, young people could speak to officers, but they needed to attend at least three times a week to make it viable. Officers acknowledged the cost to the council and made it clear passes needed to be used when issued.

4. Strategic Consultation and Voice

- Jacqueline confirmed the Quality Improvement Strategy had been ratified following consultation with Voice and Influence teams across North East London about issues including mental health support, GP appointments, waiting times and gym classes.

5. Relationship Building and Practice Standards

- Through young people-led activities, board members and officers were directly challenged on relationship building practices. Young people identified key factors that build relationships including social workers following through on commitments, trust, honesty, and accountability.
- Young people also identified relationship-breaking behaviours including not informing about leave arrangements, gatekeeping important information, false promises and making excuses, and treating the role as "just a job to pay bills."

6. Practice Improvement through Direct Feedback

- Kobus Grobbelaar asked young people about engaging reluctant young people, receiving guidance that consistency and demonstrating trustworthiness were essential.
- Casey Harman sought advice on practitioner transitions, with young people emphasising the importance of early communication and demonstrating "good goodbyes."
- Tim James probed whether young people felt hopeful for the future and about birthday card practices, revealing gaps in personal touches from social workers.

7. Strengths-Based Approach

- Faith (CiCC member) emphasised the importance of professionals having compassion in their practice.

Throughout the meeting, officers and board members were held to account for improving educational outcomes, enhancing employment opportunities, ensuring service accessibility, and fundamentally improving relationship-building practices with care-experienced young people through direct feedback and interactive learning.

Corporate Parenting Board Meeting 6 14.05.2025

An overview of key topics discussed by the Board and the approach taken by members in their scrutiny.

The Hub – Project Update

An update was provided on the ongoing work to develop The Hub:

- Plans include integrated housing for care leavers alongside support services.
- Rising costs mean the proposal is being reviewed by senior leadership.
- A more detailed timeline is expected in the new year, with further updates to follow.

Hearing from Young People

Young people reflected positively on the previous meeting, highlighting how it boosted their confidence and made them feel heard.

- A short activity encouraged Board members to reflect on actions taken since the last session. Examples included support for young people's interests, neurodivergent panels, leadership opportunities, and commitment to understanding young people's stories.
- There was a request for more clarity on apprenticeship opportunities. The Board agreed more information was needed, especially regarding a named contact in each borough and specific roles within council teams.

Young people called for deeper co-production, including:

- Shadowing professionals
- Involvement in policy development
- Participation in senior recruitment panels, with adjustments to ensure accessibility during school hours

- Officers confirmed that the 'Leaving Care' scheme had been co-designed by young people and they would be involved in its upcoming review.
- Feedback was discussed, including how foster carers could contribute. A new version of the leaving care coaches survey is in place. Confidentiality was identified as essential to honest feedback.

Action: More information to be provided to the Board on the Pan-London apprenticeship offer.

Hearing from Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)

Feedback was the main focus of the discussion:

- IROs plan to work more closely with the Voice and Influence Team to capture feedback from individual reviews.
- Concerns were raised that some young people still feel unheard, and this is exacerbated by inconsistent approaches from team managers.

Case studies were shared, including:

- A 16-year-old who exercised his legal right to exclude parents from his review due to previous abuse. IROs advocated on his behalf despite a complaint.
- Officers acknowledged the need to support emotionally complex situations with appropriate safeguarding.

Young people confirmed they have contact details for IROs and social care managers should they need to escalate concerns.

The review sign-off process was explained: while IROs complete the records, there is a dispute resolution protocol in place for disagreements.

Looked-After Children Performance Indicators

Performance data was reviewed:

- A small number of reviews missed statutory timescales, though often due to delays in uploading to the system rather than actual late meetings.
- There has been an increase in Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs), allowing more children to remain with extended families. This has contributed to more transitions but less long-term placement consistency.

Placement Stability:

- Officers reported higher entry into care among teenagers and greater difficulty matching children with appropriate carers.
- A small number of children with particularly complex needs have experienced frequent moves, sometimes due to provider limitations.
- Officers are addressing concerns with residential providers and ensuring they follow expected standards, particularly in relation to Ofsted inspections.
- Young people asked whether causes of placement breakdowns are analysed. Officers confirmed national learning is being shared and best practice is being reviewed.
- Health performance, including assessments and immunisation rates, continues to show year-on-year improvement.

Health Update

The ICB and NELFT discussed current priorities:

- Staff turnover remains stable, and young people are being appropriately tracked during entry into care processes.

- All care leavers have now completed their health discharge summaries.
- A small number of health assessments were missed due to exceptional circumstances (e.g., one young person on remand).
- Concerns were raised about the potential impact of the designated nurse leaving their role. A decision from the ICB on future structure is awaited, but social care and safeguarding oversight arrangements remain in place.

March 2025: Young Person Takeover – Feedback

Board members reflected on the 'takeover' meeting held by young people:

- While the presentation style was acknowledged as exaggerated or theatrical, young people defended the substance of the message, citing real examples of poor practice.
- It was agreed that although not fully representative, it was important to listen, address concerns, and use the feedback to improve the quality and consistency of social work practice.

Self-Assessment and Conclusion

The Corporate Parenting Board has maintained a consistent and committed approach throughout the 2024–25 reporting period, demonstrating robust governance, accountability, and a drive for continuous service improvement for children in care and care-experienced young people.

Promoting Accountability

A core strength of the board continues to be its structured format where service managers present detailed reports, followed by open, constructive questioning from board members. This format promotes accountability in multiple ways:

- Thorough scrutiny of service areas such as Health, Leaving Care, Housing, and Fostering was evident across meetings, including the detailed review of accommodation options for care leavers (09.07.2024), the Sufficiency Strategy and Placement Stability (13.11.2024), and Foster Carer Recruitment (15.01.2025). These sessions allowed the board to interrogate assumptions, challenge progress, and ensure service delivery remained aligned with young people's needs.
- Performance dashboards were presented at regular intervals, including in July, September, January, and May. These facilitated active performance monitoring and gave board members a platform to ask probing questions about trends and areas requiring further action.
- Each meeting included dialogue with Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and young people, ensuring services remained responsive to lived experience and on-the-ground observations.

Embedding a Culture of Continuous Improvement

Throughout 2024–25, the board demonstrated a commitment to improvement by responding to feedback and identifying where practice could develop further. Highlights include:

- The Voice and Influence Annual Report presented young people's perspectives and built on earlier meeting feedback from the "Young Person Takeover", translating their insights into actionable outcomes.
- Enhanced collaboration with health partners was visible in recurring Health Updates and the Looked-After Children Health Annual Reports, reflecting inter-agency effort and accountability across the system.
- The board's response to the University of Liverpool research item (09.07.2024) highlighted openness to evidence-based practice and national learning, reinforcing its role as a learning and adaptive forum.

Areas for Development

Fostering Transparency and Public Engagement

- Progress: Board minutes are now clearer and more accurately reflect discussion and decisions, improving transparency and governance records.
- Ongoing Work: Work is underway to broaden board participation beyond children's services—bringing in agencies such as housing, SEND, police, and inclusive economy partners. This potential expansion will enable a more whole-system response to the needs of care-experienced young people.
- Next Steps: The board should continue developing more accessible public communication tools (e.g., meeting summaries, engagement events) to raise

awareness of its work and ensure young people and stakeholders feel represented and informed.

Enhancing Data-Driven Decision Making

- Progress: The regular use of a Performance Indicator Dashboard, supported by the Power BI team, enables more consistent tracking of outcomes.
- Ongoing Work: While improvements have been noted, there remains a need for more sophisticated analytics and trend tracking in reports. The board and BI team are in communication about continuing to refine metrics that directly link to young people's experiences and strategic priorities.

Overall Achievement and Performance

- The 2024–25 cycle was marked by exceptional consistency—no board meetings were cancelled, all were fully attended, with members across services taking an active and constructive role in discussions.
- Contributions were consistently substantive, with members acknowledging service improvements while holding officers to account through challenge and scrutiny.
- The board has grown in confidence and maturity, performing its critical friend role effectively and centring the voices of young people throughout.

In conclusion, the Corporate Parenting Board continues to uphold its statutory and moral duty to care-experienced children and young people by holding service areas accountable, championing co-produced approaches, and continuously striving to improve outcomes. The year ahead should focus on strengthening the use of insight-rich data and widening engagement to ensure that all partners play an active role in corporate parenting.

Appendix

The following appendices contain the end of 2023/2024 highlight summary of each service area's annual reports. The content contains key data, the service area's strengths, and difficulties as well as the impact of the service on children in care and care experienced people.

Board Members

Co-Chair: Councillor Kizzy Gardiner

Co-Chair: Blessing, CiCC

Vice-Chair: Councillor Rhiannon Eglin

Committee Members:

Councillor Tim James

Councillor Marsela Berberi

Councillor Louise Mitchell

Councillor Richard Sweden

Abigail Adieze, Assistant Director of Corporate Parenting

Nicky Crouch, Strategic Director of Children's Services

Swapnil Shrivastava, Head of Service, Families and Homes

Jane Whyte, Independent Reviewing Officers Team Manager

Anne-Marie Koroma, Assistant Director – Youth and Family Resilience

Sally Peplow, University of Liverpool

Caroline Woods, Independent Reviewing Officer

Carolina Marumha, Independent Reviewing Officer

David Aizenberg, Headteacher, Virtual School

Pranay Chakravorti, Head of Integrated Commissioning

Chris Foxton, Democratic Services Officer

Kobus Grobbelaar, Head of Service, Corporate Parenting

Marc Spinoza, Doctor, NEFLT

Casey Harman, Voice and Influence Team Manager

Kirstan McConkey, Agency Advisor

Roberta Onyekwelu, Head of Service, Fostering and Adoption

Daniel Phelps, Corporate Director of Childrens' Social Care

Hanan Al-Najjir, Foster Carer

Mille Acquah, Foster Carer

Shada Panjabi, Foster Carer

Eve Austin, Named Professional for Looked After Children, NELFT

Helen Cosis-Brown, Independent Panel Chair

Lynn McBride, Assistant Director, NELFT

Kathleen Hudson, Chair, Waltham Forest Foster Carers Association

Jacqueline Simmons, Designated Nurse for Looked After Children

Melanie Smart-Williams, Designated Doctor for Looked After Children, NELFT

Eugenia Luke, Designated Nurse for Looked After Children, NEL ICB

Marc Spinoza, Doctor, NEFLT

Ash, CiCC

Aether, CiCC

Ashleigh, CiCC

Beautifull, CiCC

Brendan, CiCC

Iara, CiCC

Faith, CiCC

Nada, CiCC

Tye, CiCC

Nada, CiCC

Charis, CiCC

Yacoob, CiCC

Saarah, CiCC

Jamie, CiCC

Kianna, CiCC

Roschen, CiCC

Adoption Service

Coram – Waltham Forest Adoption Team. End of Year Report - 2024/25



Corporate Parenting Board Report Annual Report- High: The Adoption Team WF– 2025

1. Introduction

This report provides an annual overview of the work and outcomes of the WF Adoption Team for the year 2024–2025. It highlights progress, key practice developments, outcomes for children, and areas for improvement. The work of the team supports the Local Authority's duty to provide permanence and stability for children through timely, child-centred adoption planning and support.

2. Highlights and Developments

2.1 Training and Practice Development

- - Early Permanence (EP) Training: Coram continued to offer bi-monthly EP workshops, open to social workers, Child Protection Chairs, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), and legal teams. The LA has utilised these sessions effectively to promote early planning and permanency.
- - Child Permanence Report (CPR) – May 2025 Launch: Coram BAAF introduced a new CPR template. Due to limited training places, a champion model was adopted, ensuring attendees cascade knowledge and guidance within their teams.
- - AFDIT – Transracial Framework: Introduced alongside the new CPR to ensure a stronger emphasis on identity, contact, and relationships for children, especially those placed transracially.
- - Consultation Prior to Best Interest Decisions: The Adoption Team continues to provide case consultations pre-Agency Decision Maker (ADM) decisions, ensuring thorough assessments and planning.
- - Ongoing Training Opportunities: Coram staff and LA social workers have access to training in areas such as Access to Records and family finding profile writing.

3. Outcomes for Children (April 2024 – March 2025)

Indicator	Total
Best Interest Decisions Made	6
Placement Orders Granted	4
ADM Match Approvals	6
Adoptive Placements Made	12

Adoption Orders Granted	3
Change of Plans from Adoption	0

4. The Child Impact analysis since April 2024;

Step-Up Programme

The programme continued to reduce delay for harder-to-place children through intensive, bespoke family finding. Several children benefitted from this targeted approach.

Exchange and Activity Days

Held at subsidised rates, these events allowed LA social workers and foster carers to engage directly with prospective adopters.

Monthly Profiling Meetings

Regular profiling meetings between Coram and LA teams ensured early linking with adopters in Stages 1 and 2.

Post-Adoption Services

A consistent and reliable support offer remains in place for adopters, adopted children, and birth families. Seamless case transfers support continuity of care.

Adoption Support Fund (ASF)

ASF funding was accessed to deliver therapeutic support before families reached crisis, helping to maintain placement stability.

5. Challenges and Areas for Development

- Delays in Adoption Orders: Despite positive placements, a drop in Adoption Orders was noted, mainly due to delays between submission of applications, hearings, and final decisions.
- Shortage of Approved Adopters: Nationally, the number of approved adopters remains below the number of children with adoption plans. This continues to create delays for children awaiting matches.
- Capacity in Post-Adoption Support: Increased complexity and volume of post-adoption cases present ongoing challenges. Currently, the service is delivered by one dedicated post-adoption social worker.

6. Conclusion

The WF Adoption Team has achieved strong outcomes in permanency planning despite external challenges. Continued training, early intervention programmes like Step-Up, and collaborative working with Coram have contributed to high-quality practice. However, the pressure on post-adoption support and the national shortage of adopters remains priority areas for strategic development.

Report submitted to: Abigail Adieze
Corporate Parenting Board – June 2025

Signed: 
Yetunde Aileru

Role: Service Manager for Adoption

Dated: 23/06/2025

Adopting and Fostering Panel

Panel's total number of cases heard 2024/25 was a 10.67% increase from the year before.

There was a small increase in the approval of Reg 27 foster carers

There was a significant increase in the approval of Friends and Family Connected Carers.

There was a slightly higher number of resignations of foster carers (Reg 27 and Connected carers) - 65% of these were Friends and Family foster carers where the placement came to an end either by the child turning 18; there being a change in the child or young person's care plan; or an SGO order being granted. As they are only approved to care for named children, they need to resign as foster carers.

The feedback from applicants coming to panel is very positive, where they speak of their good experience in the panel and felt that it was relevant, encouraging, friendly and professional.

Impact

Children are remaining in the care of their extended family – 29 children were placed with approved Friends and Family foster carers. Of these 13 children now have Special Guardianship orders which means they now live with their extended family permanently without the need for social workers.

8 new foster carers were approved who can care for up to 11 children. This means that children are living in homes where we are able to support and monitor them to help them access the best services to meet their needs.

Residents who are applying to become foster carers or connected carers find the experience of panel helpful and they understand the relevance and need to attend the panel.

Fostering and Permanence Services

These are the highlights for Fostering and Permanence report for 2024/25. There has been notable strengths in this year for Fostering and Permanence Services in information provided below:

Strengths

The current foster carer number is now **115**

Fostering household – **75**

There has been an increase of 13 young people choosing to Stay Put with foster carers post 18 years old. 5 young people more than the previous year 23/24.

Mockingbird constellations are now **5**, an increase of 3 constellations in 23/24.

There have been 8 fostering approvals from April 24 to March 2025 and **6** more in assessment.

Connected placements in Borough are currently **22**.

Caring life stories in photos, journals and documents of over 22,000 have been captured for children and young people's journey in care.

Waltham forest has collaborated with three other local authorities in Northeast London to form a partnership (Hub) in the Department for Education (DfE) funded local community fostering project. The Hub incorporates a centrally run front door with a dedicated single point of contact, providing emotionally and practical support to enquirers and those expressing their interest to foster. This initiative is designed to deliver significant improvements in the recruitment and retention of local authority foster carers and to provide more loving homes for vulnerable children. Enquirers are dispersed to each of the four local authorities in a bid to boost each involved local authorities foster carer recruitment numbers. The DfE also funded marketing and advertising of foster carers recruitment, which enabled the Hub to challenge other Independent Fostering Agencies who provide competition in

fostering recruitment. To date, this initiative is helping local authorities in the Hub to receive more prospective fostering applicants adding positively to an increase each local authorities approved foster carers.

The DfE funding also enabled Waltham Forest and all the partners in local community fostering to create one Mockingbird Hub promoting safety and stability of the living arrangements and giving children a sense of belonging within its community ethos.

The fostering team is now fully staffed with Permanent workers, which has ensured consistency in the support and supervision of foster carers, built positive relationships and maintained stability of foster homes and living arrangements. Staffing had featured as a challenge in the last financial year 23/24.

There has been positive Innovative collaboration between the Fostering service and CAMHS to offer Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy training through workshop sessions to foster carers to equip them with skills and strategies of managing challenges and to promote stability within living arrangements. To date approximately 25 foster carers have benefited from this collaboration across 3 sessions offered and it has helped maintain stability of living arrangements and boosting sufficiency for the local authority. More sessions are planned for the rest of the financial year.

Challenges

There was 8 Foster carers resignations in this financial year and work is being done to equip our carers with strategies to deal with challenges fostering brings, through Trauma Informed training, Virtual Reality resource of videos used to instil some understanding of children's lived experiences, Mockingbird model constellation support and the earlier mentioned Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy joint work with foster carers and CAMHS.

Impact for children & young people

- Stability of alternative homes through the Mockingbird Project, also peer support to help foster carers retention.
- Sense of belonging as part of a community for children within the Mockingbird
- The use of Virtual Reality videos is being used to support the alternative homes to ensure stability for looked after children and to build a sense of home and Permanence including long term matches.
- The child's journey and life history are regularly captured and saved for when children leave care and wish to access their records anytime.

Other Highlights for the Fostering Service:

- The two fostering Home Improvements supported by the local authority have been maximised in terms of space to care for looked after children.
- Fostering carers/connected carers/SG/Kinship/CAO uplifts of 3.55% is being discussed as an increase to be applied as a National Allowance for children as part of a government directive from the Minister for children. Once signed off, this payment of Children's allowances should be applied across the board from April 2025.

Permanence and Post Order Service

This financial year, there has been a noticeable increase in a total of **24** Special Guardianship orders being granted, a huge increase from 23/24 which was only **2**.

Waltham Forest continue to maximise the allocation for Adoption Support Fund (ASF) applications in this year through regular referrals of families to funded support services.

Family Fun days for Special Guardians are held twice a year and support groups are held monthly. Carers often feedback on the benefits of creating

these spaces for networking and relationship building amongst carers and children.

There is also the opportunity for Special Guardians to engage in PAC-UK mediation service, PAC-UK advice line extensively used to guide and support permanent care arrangement.

Going forward for Permanence:

Staff at Permanence & Post Order had the opportunity to attend the Dyadic development Psychotherapy training and workshop sessions in May 2025 along with the fostering service team to assist in gaining knowledge of how carers can support the challenges of the children they care for. Knowledge acquired is shared through supervision and support with carers.

In June 2025, Children's Services in Waltham Forest has adopted the New Form K, which CORAM designed for use in connected carer assessments. The use of this form has provided better analysis of assessments of family and friends who have put themselves forward to care for children in their extended families.

Adoption support fund services have been re-vamped unfortunately; and funding has reduced from £5,000 to £3,000. Waltham Forest carers use this support to maintain stability of living arrangements.

Health

Looked After Children

Waltham Forest Children's Services has received an overall 'Good' outcome, with an Outstanding judgement for the progress of children in care, following a visit from OFSTED between 1 to 12 July 2024. Reported 20-08-2024

Progress against objectives set out in 2023-24 annual report

CAMHS / Mental Health; to promote better access to CAMHS and mental health services.

Children's / Young People's Mental Wellbeing Group Youth Mental Health Advisors have

completed a mapping exercise of available mental health services within Waltham Forest that looked after children and care leavers can be signposted to.

There has been an increase in referrals to CAMHS from Waltham Forest social workers, with 23 referrals between July and September. This reflects a positive change in perception among social workers regarding the value of referring cases to CAMHS and shows the value and the positive impact of the CLA Champion CAMHS team.

A second primary mental health worker has been recruited, starting in January, increasing capacity for social worker consultations.

Foster carers are attending a therapeutic parenting group course facilitated by the Local Authority and WF CAMHS. This has proved successful and is on its 3rd cohort.

GP Practices: To improve the experience of CLA with the GP services ensuring they have time with to discuss their health.

This remains ongoing.

Physical Health –access to good physical health facilities, either through free or discounted membership to gyms, or after school clubs or youth clubs.

Free gym membership remains available to Waltham Forest Looked after children and is reviewed to ensure that the benefits are being used.

Free prescriptions are available to Care Leavers and Waltham Forest LA have ensured that those that are in need receive the service.

Dental issues – Designated Nurse to highlight and address the problems around getting dental appointments.

The difficulties in getting dental appointments post pandemic has reduced. The latest figures for dental appointments are on average 81.1% for Quarter 4. Where there are problems foster

carers have been able to contact the CLA Nursing team who have assisted in getting an appointment. WF borough still has a dental practice that is committed to seeing CLA.

Looked After Children Reviews - To monitor and profile the outcomes for better physical and mental health by auditing our IHA and RHA reports.

Promoting 'language that cares' (TACT 2019) in reports.

The Initial and Review health assessments have been audited in January and March 2025. The audits reflected good practice and holistic detailed reports. The actions and outcomes have been documented in the audit reports.

Transition to adulthood – to work collaboratively with local authority, delivery partners and Care Leavers Compact in ensuring transition planning is started early and adult services are notified of the physical and mental health needs of the child.

The Named Nurse attends the LA transition panel to ensure timely transition planning for CLA.

To safeguard children and care leavers against exploitation, considering contextual safeguarding especially for those children placed out of borough.

The Named Nurse attends the LA exploitation panel to be aware of those CLA who are at risk.

Improve performance of health indicators and continue partnership working to improve timeliness and quality of statutory health assessments.

Weekly joint meetings with LA, ICB and NELFT provider has ensured that the statutory initial health assessments are processed smoothly and within the required timeframe. The annual audits of the assessment reports ensures that the quality of the reports is upheld.

Work with the children in care council and care leavers champions to develop more health promotion activities on their chosen topics and involve the public health and provider health team.

The joint team meet with CLA and care leavers at

the regular Corporate Parenting Board meetings where the children are vocal about how they would like their health to be improved. The Nursing team attend The Hub monthly, to be available for any queries relating to physical and mental health.

Key system issues

- Collaboration between delivery partners and the acute providers is required for CLA who remain on Emergency Departments or wards when medically fit for discharge.
- Immunisations and dental appointments; the Named Nurse attends the LA weekly data meetings for, outstanding immunisations and dental appointments. For Quarter 4 Immunisations are at 61.8% and dental appointments 81.1%
- Quality Improvement Programme (QIP)- system work is ongoing to a NEL wide dashboard for Looked After Children data to provide a single view.
- NELFT are looking to standardise the Care Leavers Health Summary offer.

Workforce capacity and system risks

- The Nursing Team have 1 part time nursing vacancy since February 2025. An interim administrator is required for maternity leave cover. Joint administrative post for LA and NELFT has been successfully recruited to and has proved to be effective at progressing the statutory paperwork smoothly.
- Social Care to employ a GP with special interest to complete the adult medicals required to recruit adult carers for WF. This post will be facilitated through NELFT.

Priorities for the coming year (2025-2026)

Included from the voice of the child and the NEL ICB strategy for both in and out of borough.

1. CAMHS / Mental Health; to continue promote better access to CAMHs and mental health services for children both in and out of borough.
2. GP Practices: To improve the experience of CLA with the GP services ensuring they have time with to discuss their health.
3. To improve the immunisations uptake within the CLA population.
4. Transition to adulthood – to work collaboratively with local authority, delivery partners and Care Leavers Compact in ensuring transition planning is started early and adult services are notified of the physical and mental health needs of the child.
5. To safeguard children and care leavers against exploitation, considering contextual safeguarding especially for those children placed out of borough.
6. Improve performance of health indicators and continue partnership working to improve timeliness and quality of statutory health assessments.
7. Work with the children in care council and care leavers champions, through the Corporate Parenting Board, to develop more health promotion activities on their chosen topics and involve the public health and provider health team.

Independent Reviewing Service

What is going well?

There were 674 childcare reviews held in 2024/25 and 93% were held on time.

74% of reviews were held in person with the remainder arranged so the right people were included in decision making. 115 reviews were held as a series of meetings to support participation. Reviews are inclusive and child centred. In 71% of reviews children aged four and over attended and spoke for themselves.

Young people will sometimes attend the review in part, or make other contributions; one young person wrote a story for their review, which started with two sisters getting lost. This young person had only recently seen her sister after many months estranged. She assured the IRO the story would have a good ending. She also came and went in the review, all the while being encouraged to take part.

For another young person the IRO has been seeing them both before and after the review, building a safe and consistent relationship over a decade. At their most recent review the young person “attended their review from the start and was happy to be present throughout, even challenging their foster carer, expressing themselves fully and with confidence”.

One professional provided feedback to say the meeting was child centred and “the IRO ensured they saw the child on their own to ascertain their views about the care plan”.

There is evidence of IRO's having provided an increased level of oversight between reviews.

Child S wanted to move into a Staying Put arrangement with the parents of a friend. They believed their social worker had refused to consider this and contacted their IRO. The IRO followed this up and the connected persons assessment will be presented to Panel in July in advance of Child S turning 18 in September.

Final reviews are routinely held at the Hub where the leaving care services are based. This promotes the attendance of the leaving care coach and provides an opportunity for the young person to look around the Hub and find out more about the services available. IRO's were satisfied with 98% of Pathway Plans that were completed.

What could we do better?

Fathers attended 16% of reviews and mothers attended 37%. We need to better understand how we can continue to support family decision making when children become looked after and it is safe and right to do so.

We received very little feedback from children / young people, their parents / carers and professionals working with them. We want to find innovative ways to improve upon this.

There was a permanence plan at 93% of second reviews which is a slight decrease on last year. Anecdotally, social workers are not always aware of the need to convene Permanence Planning Meetings for all children who need one.

Care Plans were up to date at 89% of reviews. This should be 100%. The written plan is not always shared before the review with those involved, including the child. This impacts negatively on meaningful participation in decision making.

We need to better evidence the informal challenge of IRO's and be confident that this (along with practice highlights) is used to improve upon practice.

IRO Impact

In 2024/25 IRO's continued to ensure that care plans met the needs of children looked after in Waltham Forest. Where gaps were evident, or there were differences of opinion, then the IRO would always facilitate collaborative discussions, including with partner agencies, for example, with fdsCAFCASS during proceedings.

One young person was living in a residential home. Arrangements were put in place to move him to a foster carer, which the IRO argued was inappropriate given his specific needs and considering his wishes and feelings. The young person remains in residential care, where his needs continue to be met.

For another child, aged 10, the plan was to move from residential care to foster care. Child S did not want to, and their wishes and feelings, based upon need, were supported by the IRO for 2 years, during which time he has been helped to move towards this goal. This year he successfully transitioned to foster care.

The care plan proposed for two siblings was to live with their aunt and uncle. A special guardianship assessment was completed and recommended approval. This IRO questioned the quality of the assessment, and their views were taken into account by the Panel which, in turn, did not approve the assessment. A decision for adoption is now pending from the Agency Decision Maker.

On a strategic level, transition planning is starting earlier with an expectation that young people should be presented to Transitions Panel aged 17 rather than aged 17 ½. This was raised at Corporate Parenting Board in July 2024. Leaving Care Coaches attend final reviews and we are working towards having them attend pen-ultimate reviews.

The pathway plan for Gavin (aged 17) was to move from his Nan to live in semi-independent accommodation. The IRO did not think that Gavin had the required skills as his Nan did everything for him. The social worker and managers argued that he needed to move on to learn the skills. When Gavin moved the IRO advocated for additional support hours to help him develop the required skills to live more independently. The IRO advocated for him to stay in semi-

independent accommodation post-18, which was agreed for a short while.

The IRO service continues to provide independent oversight of the statutory requirements for individual children through reviewing their care plans and wider oversight, through reports to Impact Board and other relevant forums, including Corporate Parenting Board.

Leaving Care Service

The Care Leavers Annual report provides an oversight and insight into the progress that the service has made to continue to support care experienced young people. Care experienced young people have been actively involved in shaping the service. The leaving care service consist out of a committed group of managers and leaving care coaches making sure that networking and collaborative opportunities are created for our young people in LBWF. Great achievements this year included ongoing support services as follows:

- Role out of free prescriptions
- Mental health support through 18 – 25 CAMHS service
- Joint housing protocol updated to include that intentional homelessness can only be agreed by Housing and Social care service directors
- Young people are benefitting from 50% discount from TFL
- Monthly Drop ins with the Rents Team
- Drop ins with DWP work coach, who is based at the Hub twice a week
- CGL drop ins once a month
- Sexual Health Drop ins once a month
- Monthly evening “Get Together’s” to allow young the opportunity to socialise, have a

meal, watch a movie, chat and relax. We now offer a separate evening “Get Together for UASC young people.

- DWP advice/support sessions for Providers/Social Workers and Foster Carers
- Developing “baby boxes for Newborns”
- Recruiting two care experienced young people for an Apprenticeship roles within the London Borough of Waltham Forest and we are in the process developing further opportunities within the council

Service Provision – Leaving Care Service

The number of care experience young people has increased from April 2014 (415) to March 2025 (373). The service has 16 Leaving care Coaches who are supporting care experienced young people with an average caseload of 23. The Leaving Care Service is led by three dedicated managers who offer compassionate, consistent oversight and bring strong partnership-working skills. Their leadership ensures that care-experienced young people are well-supported through effective networks, helping to secure positive and lasting outcomes as they transition to independence.

The service duties include:

- Having an allocated leaving care coach,
- Staying in touch with the young person,
- Needs assessment and pathway plans are reviewed every six months,
- Care experienced young people are supported to access education, employment and training
- The leaving care service will collaboratively with the support from our housing colleagues ensure that care experienced young people are able to access suitable accommodation.

Continued support until 25 years

London Borough of Waltham Forest remains committed to supporting care-experienced young people as they transition into adulthood, ensuring they are equipped with the skills and confidence needed for independent living. Through the Local Offer and in alignment with the Care Leaver Covenant, the borough provides targeted support such as the 'Moving On' workshops. These workshops focus on developing key life skills—such as budgeting, tenancy readiness, and employment preparation—empowering young people to achieve positive and sustainable outcomes

These workshops focus on:

- Budgeting skills
- What it means to maintain a home
- What do I need to do to apply for my own accommodation
- What are benefits'; 'what are my benefit entitlements
- How do I access education, training and employment'; and 'what alternatives are available if I am not yet ready to access education, training or employment
- How to maintain a tenancy and if you have rent arrears, how we will support you in resolving it

Ongoing Support Beyond Age 21

Care-experienced young people continue to receive support from their Leaving Care Coach beyond their 21st birthday, enabling continued access to a multi-agency network of professionals up to the age of 25. This sustained support helps to ensure that young people experience continuity in their relationships and are not left to navigate adulthood alone.

When a young person turns 25—or if they request to step down from the service earlier—there remains an open invitation for them to reconnect at any time, should they need further advice or

assistance. Drop-in sessions at The Hub are available as a safe and welcoming point of access for re-engagement.

Young people who are deallocated are transitioned to universal services, but a proactive approach is maintained through annual contact by duty workers up to their 25th birthday. Staff are deeply committed to building lasting, meaningful relationships, so that care-experienced young people see their Leaving Care Coach as more than just a professional—they are a trusted and consistent source of support during a crucial period of transition. Collaborative and multi-agency approach during transitions.

Multi-Agency Transition Planning

LBWF continues to utilise a dedicated Transitions Panel to ensure a coordinated, person-centred approach to supporting young people as they move towards independence. The panel plays a key role in remain focused on the individual needs, strengths, and aspirations of each care-experienced young person as they approach adulthood.

This collaborative forum brings together a wide range of professionals—including representatives from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), LBWF Housing, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Services, the Virtual School, Primary Mental Health Services, Placements Team, Probation, and Drive Forward Foundation.

Together with the young person, the panel reviews support plans, progress, and future goals to ensure that robust, multi-agency arrangements are in place by the time the young person turns 18. Their voice is central to the planning process.

The Leaving Care Service continues to explore creative and flexible opportunities to meet the diverse needs of our young people—helping them build confidence, acquire practical life skills, and make a successful transition into adulthood and independence.

Aspirations

The Leaving Care Service in Waltham Forest is firmly aspirational for our young people, aiming not only to create meaningful opportunities for them to enjoy life, but also to support and inspire them to pursue their own goals and ambitions. We are committed to helping care-experienced young people believe in their potential and take confident steps towards achieving it.

Our work to raise aspirations begins early, from Year 9 onwards, with initiatives such as university visits and targeted focus groups where young people can discuss and shape the support available to help them reach their goals. Collaborative planning is a cornerstone of our approach, ensuring that each young person's unique needs are understood and addressed as part of their transition out of care.

The Virtual School plays a key role in this journey, continuing to build strong partnerships with universities and brokering tailored support packages for individuals. These efforts are complemented by a clear and structured incentive scheme that enables young people to access financial support when participating in training or educational opportunities.

In addition to these core offers, further support available includes:

- Personal advisors providing one-to-one tailored guidance
- Access to the Leaving Care Hub, a dedicated space for support and learning
- Mental health and wellbeing support
- Housing and tenancy preparation advice
- Support with employment, apprenticeships, and further education pathways
- Opportunities to engage in co-production and service development

This holistic and aspirational approach ensures that care-experienced young people are not only

supported practically, but also inspired to imagine and achieve a positive future.

Additional support can include:

- Access financial support for school trips abroad
- Access support for equipment that is related to education, training and employment.
- Vacation accommodation.

Developing Strong Futures for Care Experienced Young People

Accommodation

Accommodation is one of LBWF high priorities for our care experienced young people. We acknowledge that with a stably place you can call home you are in a better position to start thinking of higher aspirations and progression in life to get yourself established in the community. Suitable accommodation for our care experienced young people between the ages of 17-18 years old is 92% which is higher than neighbouring local authorities. Our 19-21 is 94.6 % also above our statistical neighbours. Our cohort of young between 22-25 is 90.3%. It is important to note that the unsuitable accommodation identified comprises of young people who are in prison or detention. Leaving care service and LBWF housing work collaboratively to ensure that care experience young people can access suitable council accommodating when they are entitled to at ages of 18 year. LBWF housing see our care leavers as one of their priority groups. LBWF housing acknowledge the challenges that some of our young people face as part of transitioning into their own accommodation, making sure that when there exists issue, they consider alternatives for our young people, creating opportunities/chances.

This includes considering the specific needs of care experienced young people in relation to issues that might exist for example gangs, county lines, criminal exploitation, and previous historical

challenges that the young person might have faced in the past.

Additionally, the joint protocol between LBWF housing and leaving care service has been updated to include that intentionally homelessness will only be agreed to once this has been agreed by both LBWF social care and LBWF housing director.

Education, Training and Employment

In the review of the children's social care system, Josh MacAlister set a mission to create more jobs for care leavers by 2026.

The London Borough of Waltham Forest has been developing and is creating opportunities, such as putting forward six young people for an internship in the Civil Service which is an exciting opportunity. The Care Leavers Internship Scheme is an award-winning scheme run by the Department for Education. Which offers jobs for care leavers in either a central government department or agency. The duration of the internship scheme is 18-months.

We are proud to launch the Care Leaver Apprenticeship Programme, which began in April 2025 as a two-year pilot aimed at supporting care-experienced young people into meaningful and sustainable employment. The programme includes a structured and enhanced induction period, followed by two one-year placements across different service areas, and concludes with a tailored package of employment support designed to help participants secure permanent roles.

Currently, two care-experienced young people—both residents of the London Borough of Waltham Forest—are taking part in the pilot. They have made a strong start, are settling well into their roles, and have spoken positively about the support received from the Leaving Care Service, which they describe as instrumental in helping them build confidence and navigate the workplace.

This initiative reflects our commitment to providing real pathways into employment for our care leavers and forms part of our broader effort to raise aspirations and ensure every young person has the opportunity to thrive.

Building on the success of the Care Leaver Apprenticeship Programme, our aim is to expand this model to develop further exciting and meaningful opportunities for care-experienced young people across the Local Authority. As a Corporate Parent, we are committed to being proactive, visible, and accountable—ensuring that we not only advocate for our young people but also open doors to real prospects that lead to long-term success.

We want our care-experienced young people to see Waltham Forest Council as an organisation that believes in them, invests in their potential, and provides the kind of opportunities and support that any good parent would offer. Through this programme and future initiatives, we continue to strengthen our offer and uphold our responsibility to give every young person the best possible start into adulthood.

In addition to this we have had local employment opportunities such as Revel Puck Circus, work during the election.

LBWF leaving care service with the support from Virtual school continue to work innovatively to make sure that opportunities are creatively developed for young people to access any form of education, training, and employment. LBWF had for 17–18-year-old young people 56.5% in ETE (Education Training and Employment) which is lower than England (64%) and similar areas (65%). For our 19 – 21-year-olds 56.5% young people are in ETE and is lower than England (59%) and higher than similar areas (54%). For our 22-25 32.9%. During the summer graduation on of our young people have graduated as a medical doctor.

We realise that some of our young people might not yet be ready for formal education and employment opportunities and as such additional

opportunities are available through 'Taster days', MY Bank Financial/Money Budgeting, CM2 Construction (training provider for construction skills certification scheme qualifications) and The Kings Trust 16-30 education/training/employment support programme. **Drive Forward** has now become part of the LBWF we rely on creating opportunities for young people to access and improve our education training and employment offer to young people. Countryside partnerships are a construction firm who are offering apprenticeships work experiences and training being offered next to the Town Hall. There is a total of 13 young people who have been put forward to access opportunities.

EET Group offering two days course for young people to access CSC qualification. Twelve week programme at the Leyton Orient is offering motivational skills development, CV development, enabling young people to develop the necessary skills to become ready for careers path.

The DWP and Drive forward will continue to offering care experienced young people further life skills development opportunities. Youth Futures Foundation (Youth Futures) is launching a unique opportunity for local authorities (LAs) in Greater London to become referral partners in a randomised controlled trial (RCT) of Drive Forward Foundation's 'Care to Career' programme. Youth Futures will be taking a staged approach to preparing and mobilising this RCT:

- Co-creation and mobilisation phase (April – December 2025)
- Pilot phase (early 2026) followed by the Full Trial (following pilot, 2026-2028). The London Borough of Waltham Forest has been selected as one of the pilot Local Authorities.

We are also developing a strong partnership with the Service Store for two key purposes that align with our corporate parenting responsibilities. Firstly, we are piloting a practical support offer to help care-experienced young people set up and personalise their own homes as they move into

independence. This includes hands-on assistance with decorating, fitting flooring, assembling flat-pack furniture, and connecting essential appliances such as cookers. This practical help is designed to reduce stress, increase confidence, and foster a genuine sense of ownership and stability.

Secondly, this partnership is being developed as a pathway into employment, with opportunities for care-experienced young people to access apprenticeships and job roles within various areas of the Service Store Department. This dual approach not only meets immediate practical needs but also contributes to long-term aspirations and sustainable independence through skills development and employment.

This innovative collaboration is another example of how Waltham Forest is embedding our role as a responsible and ambitious Corporate Parent into everyday practice, ensuring that our young people are supported in both their home lives and future careers.

To strengthen our ETE support for care experienced young people a ETE Panel has been set up that specifically focus on young people who are not in ETE. The panel consist of various partnership agencies such as DWP, Drive Forward, Brokerage Team, Virtual School who are looking at who is best placed to support a young person with ETE opportunities.

DWP Workshop

Life Skills development

Moving on and taking care workshops are offered at the HUB for all emerging 18-year-old young people. These are offered by Housing department, DWP and The Rents team respectively. Taking care workshop consist of CGL, CAMHS 18 Plus and sexual Health. In addition to this we provide make-up and hair cut sessions for all the young people.

Taking Care workshop

Virtual School continue to negotiate for additional financial assistance and wider packages of support, liaising closely with the universities when required. There also exist a strong liaison between UNI pastoral care and Leaving care service where there is a need to ensure a support network is in place for a care experienced young person. The working relationship between the Virtual School and leaving care team is very strong; care experienced young people know our virtual school staff very well and because of the intensive 1:1 support provided, these relationships are often long-standing and helpful in facilitating transitions.

Emotional and physical health of our young people

The service continues to benefit from the pathway that exist for support for care experience young people from the **Waltham Forest CAMHS CYP 18-25 SERVICE**. Young people continue to benefit from **free prescriptions** for care experienced young people. The refugee pathway offer support to UASC young people with counselling and therapeutic services.

Primary mental health worker continues to take part in our practice support groups and in addition, provide individual support and consultation to social workers, leaving care coaches, foster carers, the virtual school and young people. They liaise with CAMHS, accessing additional services as necessary.

Staying in touch with our Care experience young people

All operational functions and support offered by the Leaving Care Service are delivered from The Hub—our dedicated space for care-experienced young people. The Hub has become more than just a service base; it plays a vital role in creating a sense of belonging and connection, both for young people and for the professionals who support them.

The service continues to prioritise flexible, young person-centred engagement. This includes visiting young people at home, meeting them in college, or facilitating peer connection through informal drop-ins at The Hub. These varied approaches help ensure that young people feel heard, supported, and connected, no matter where they are in their journey.

The Hub not only provides practical support, but also fosters identity, inclusion, and trust—key ingredients in helping our young people thrive as they transition into adulthood.

Council Tax

All care leavers living in LBWF liability to pay council tax are reduced to nil. The LBWF leaving care service pay young people's council tax if they live outside LBWF boundaries.

The My Guide

LBWF use the 'My Guide' as a framework for care-experienced young people to develop their independent life skills. Young people, social workers, foster carers and key workers can work collaboratively focusing on specific areas. Joint up working exists between our DWP colleagues who provide consultations to staff and young people on claims and entitlements while team managers monitor benefit claims

The Hub: A Safe and Supportive Space

The current Leaving Care Hub continues to serve as a welcoming and multifunctional space for care-experienced young people. It provides a safe environment for private meetings with Leaving Care Coaches, as well as opportunities to engage with partner services and support providers.

There are regular drop ins offered, offering a valuable forum for young people to connect, share experiences, and access support within a nurturing setting.

The Hub remains a practical resource for young people, with regular use of the computer suite to complete homework, develop CVs, and search for

job opportunities. The space also encourages social connection, with young people using it to cook meals together, play games, and relax.

Emergency laundry facilities are available, ensuring basic needs are met. In addition, young people are actively engaging in external activities through the local boxing club, with one young person notably winning four matches and being earmarked for future national-level competition.

Monthly social evenings—or “Get Togethers”—continue to take place, offering a relaxed setting where young people can enjoy meals, take part in discussions on topics that matter to them, and watch films. A dedicated UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children) Get Together is also held separately, recognising and responding to their unique experiences and needs.

As part of life skills development, Multiply continues to deliver cooking and budgeting sessions from the Hub, supporting young people to build confidence in managing everyday responsibilities and preparing for independent living.

Care Leavers Week

Care leavers week will again be celebrated in October 2025 with fun packed activities that include day trips and educational events.. Outdoor sports and lunch will be offered at the Leyton Cricket ground conjunction with Voice and Influence Service.

Feedback from young person

“If it wasn’t for Nathaniel I don’t think I would be here now and that’s the truth, in the last year I have made an extremely positive turn around in my life, I won’t go into too much details but I was completely down the wrong route doing the wrong things and it was looking like I was going to go prison, at this stage in my life I hadn’t long just turned 18 and really didn’t know what to do with my life. When everything was really face down in the mud, Nathaniel was there for me every step of the way. Whilst I was on bail, Nathaniel was always coming to my dad’s house to see me

make sure I’m okay, he brought me a phone when I didn’t have one to make sure I had a communication method to get hold of him and who ever I needed to. He called me every day without a doubt and took me to numerous different job fairs (went out of his way to pick me up, drop me off, make sure I was fed) and was helping me to turn my life around in the right direction and make a great appeal to the court if needed. Nathaniel explained every little detail to me on next steps etc: how to get housing, starting to do driving lessons, teaching me ways to save. And was basically helping me do everything to make sure I made it out of the path I was on. Nathaniel still calls me all the time and comes and checks up on me all the time, just to make it apparent.

I really can’t thank Nathaniel enough for all his hard work on me. Currently I’m learning to drive and should hopefully have my licence by summer, I have a full-time job as a sales assistant at JD minimum 40 hours, I’m also a carer for my nan and do all the DIY and cleaning around the house. To this day all my friends even say to me it’s amazing the change I’ve made they don’t know how I’ve done it, but it’s all thanks to Nathaniel, he has got me a long way from where I was at and I really can’t thank him enough.”

Social events at the Hub

Boxing Club: The HUB creates opportunities where some young people are able to meet and socialise and, in some cases, where young people are available, to celebrate Christmas/ birthdays and or having a good old catch up.

Baby gift set: The young parents are supported to make sure they can be great parents and can learn and develop with advice and guidance. They are offered a welcome “baby box” gift set.

Impact of our Services to young people

Our Voice and Influence Service continues to play a vital role in empowering care-experienced young people to share their views and reflections on the support they receive from the Leaving Care Service. Through structured feedback

mechanisms such as Score Cards, young people are encouraged to express their experiences openly.

This feedback is carefully reviewed and shared with individual Leaving Care Coaches as part of ongoing reflective practice and is incorporated into staff appraisal processes to support continuous improvement.

The latest Score Card results show:

- **93%** of care leavers feel that their Leaving Care Coach “tries their best” for them
- **90%** agree or strongly agree that their social worker takes time to explain things clearly
- **85%** feel that their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is patient and understanding

These results reflect the strong, trusted relationships built between young people and professionals, and underline our ongoing commitment to listening, learning, and improving the services we provide

Progress Following Recognition of Care-Experienced Young People as a Protected Characteristic

Following the full Council’s decision to recognise care-experienced young people as a protected characteristic, several meaningful improvements have been implemented to strengthen their support and safeguard their rights:

The Joint Housing Protocol between LBWF Housing and the Leaving Care Service has been updated to ensure that a finding of intentional homelessness can only be made as a last resort and must be formally agreed by both the Housing and Social Care Directors.

Five young people have successfully accessed apprenticeship opportunities, supporting their entry into skilled employment.

Multi-Agency Network meetings continue to provide a structured and collaborative forum for

reviewing the quality and effectiveness of services offered to care-experienced young people.

Young people now benefit from the CAMHS 18–25 mental health service, offering age-appropriate emotional and psychological support.

Transport for London (TfL) continues to provide care-experienced young people with a 50% travel discount, improving access to education, training, and employment.

All care leavers in LBWF are eligible for free prescriptions, reducing financial barriers to essential healthcare.

Council Tax liability for care leavers is reduced to nil for those living within LBWF, and is covered by the service for those living outside the borough.

These enhancements reflect the borough’s commitment to levelling the playing field for care-experienced young people and ensuring they receive the tailored support they deserve as they transition to adulthood.

Future plans for Leaving Care Hub:

Work is under way to explore the development of a purpose-built Leaving Care Hub at the former George Mitchell Secondary School Craft Design and Technology (CDT) Block in Farmer Road Leyton E10. The Leaving Care Hub will provide an integrated personalised service to young care leavers aged 18-25 years old to prepare them for independent living but also to offer a place they can use as a drop in to meet and socialise with friends and their leaving care coaches. There continue to exist aspiration for this to possibly include 3-6 self-contained residential units within the Hub to prepare care leavers for independent living.

Care leavers as Protected Characteristic

‘Considering care leaver status alongside other protected characteristics’

Since the London Borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF) agreed to considering care leaver status alongside other protected characteristics. LBWF

has demonstrated a proactive approach in developing ring-fenced apprenticeship posts and Future Pathways for care-experienced young people. This initiative seeks to provide these young individuals with dedicated opportunities to gain valuable work experience and develop skills that will support their transition to independent adulthood. The aim is to empower them with the tools they need to thrive in the workforce and society.

However, greater awareness is needed to ensure that this initiative is widely understood across the organization. Efforts are underway to disseminate information through internal newsletters, training sessions, and informational materials. By increasing awareness, LBWF aims to ensure that all staff members are equipped to contribute to the success of this initiative and provide consistent support to care-experienced young people.

Additionally, there is ongoing work with local private and voluntary organizations to enhance the Local Offer for care leavers. These partnerships are crucial in expanding the range of services and opportunities available, including housing, education, mental health support, and recreational activities. By leveraging the strengths of various organizations, LBWF ensures that care leavers have access to a comprehensive support network.

The leaving care service, however, continues to rely on LBWF Corporate Services to further create collaborative opportunities for care leavers within LBWF as set out in the Corporate Parenting Principles 2018. This includes internships, mentoring programs, and career development workshops designed specifically for care leavers. By fostering a supportive and inclusive workplace, LBWF not only enhances the prospects of these young individuals but also enriches the organization with diverse perspectives and talents.

Addressing Current Challenges and Achieving High Aspirations

The Leaving Care Service has high aspirations for the young people it supports, aiming to provide them with the necessary tools and opportunities to succeed in education, employment, and training. Despite this LBWF have not been able to increase our ETE numbers care experienced young people.

Many young people in the Leaving Care Service require extensive interventions on a consistent basis to enable a collaborative and cocreation working with young people to access the support available to achieve their future goals. These services that needs to be access focus specifically on supporting young people in their educational endeavours, apprenticeships, and employment opportunities. Liaises with key stakeholders such as employment agencies, universities, and colleges. As a local authority we acknowledge that we need to review current processes and support structures to enable meeting the demands and the specific needs of our care experienced young people.

Focus areas following visit from Ofsted:

Following the last Ofsted visit, several key areas for development have been identified to strengthen the support provided to care-experienced young people:

Enhancing collaboration between social workers and the Leaving Care Service to ensure that all young people are introduced to their Leaving Care Coach prior to their 18th birthday, allowing for a smoother and more supported transition.

Ensuring that all young people are actively involved in the development of their Pathway Plans, with a clear understanding of their rights and entitlements.

Increasing awareness and understanding of the Leaving Care Offer, making sure all care-experienced young people are fully informed of the support and opportunities available to them.

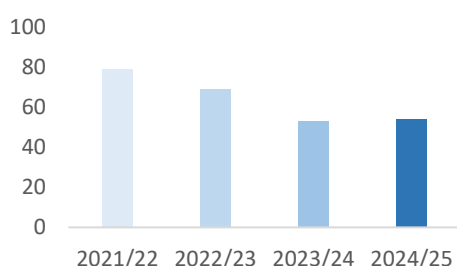
Review the current Pathway plan and needs assessment document previously designed by young people.

Review current structures in place to support ETE opportunity for young people in LBWF.

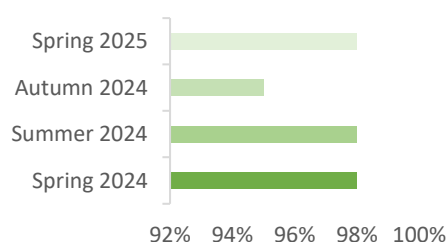
These focus areas are being addressed through strengthened joint working, improved communication pathways, and targeted engagement with young people as they prepare to transition from care.

Virtual Schools

Suspensions



PEP Completion Rate



67% Good or Outstanding Progress



98% Of children attended

schoools graded 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by OFSTED

Our Approach

Our vision is for our children and young people to engage with lifelong learning that equips them with skills and motivation to be happy, resilient and valued members of the community.

We are a curious, relationship-focused Virtual School that holds trauma and attachment in mind when working with our children. We support and challenge the important people in children's lives to prioritise their education and to hold the highest aspirations for our children.

Strengths

We have delivered training to a range of partners championing the education of children in care, including social workers, foster carers, teachers, governors, early years settings and residential care providers.

We work closely with social care and collectively ensure that children's education stability is prioritised, with more than two thirds of home moves not requiring a change of school.

We have a strong focus on promoting emotional wellbeing and support for special educational needs, ensuring high standards as noted in the OFSTED Area SEND Inspection

We continue to recognise the importance of nurturing children's creativity and broadening their experiences, running workshops in photography and filmmaking, helping organise a borough-wide celebration event, and supporting a wide variety of trips, experiences and excursions.

We have used pupil premium grant funding to commission thousands of hours of tuition, alongside numerous interventions, opportunities, learning tools and support packages

Developments & challenges

Too many children continue to miss out on time in school, either through suspension or absence – We continue to develop new approaches to avoiding lost learning time

Too many school days are lost for children with complex needs. This is often due to waiting for a school place. Whilst tuition is arranged, getting children into school earlier is a priority.

We want to see more children in care progress into higher education and stable employment, which is a strong focus for us in the year ahead

Voice and Influence Service

The Voice & Influence Service works with our Children & Young People in Care and Care Leavers to understand their experiences as they navigate their care journey. We utilise these insights to influence change within children's services.

Some of our key highlights from 2024/25 include:

Young People's Input into the Corporate Parenting Board

The Board is co-chaired by a care-experienced young person who also attended Parliament with Cllr Gardiner to meet Calvin Bailey MP. Young people attend every Board meeting and have a standing agenda item at the start to report their views. This year's reports have included recommendations for mental health support and guidance on facilitating good transitions.

The final session of the Board for 2024/25 was the annual Young People's Takeover. Young people planned a session focused on the building blocks of good relationships, active listening role-play, and the importance of context in decision-making. Their contributions are always well received and widely promoted.

Reworking 'My Guide'

Our 2023/24 Annual Report highlighted concerns from young people who felt inadequately prepared to leave care and transition to independence. In response, we reviewed current resources and identified the need for a refreshed and more comprehensive version of *My Guide*.

To ensure the updated guide reflects the real needs and experiences of young people, we engaged directly with care leavers, children in care, and foster carers. The new guide is becoming a co-produced, dynamic program that will be delivered through various mediums, including workbooks, video modules, and in-person sessions. This resource will be piloted with young people and carers before wider distribution.

Welcome Home Packs

Care leavers told us they felt "lost and overwhelmed" when moving into their own properties—often in unfamiliar areas and faced with many new responsibilities. In response, we co-developed an information pack that includes practical advice, hints, and tips about bills, expectations, and getting along with neighbours. Each pack also contains information about local services and resources to help them settle in.

These printed packs have been distributed to Leaving Care teams, and Leaving Care Coaches ensure each young person receives a pack tailored to their area when they move in. Feedback has been positive, with young people appreciating the ability to refer to the pack when questions arise.

The team finishes the year having accomplished impactful work that has made a real difference in the experiences of our Children & Young People in Care and Care Leavers.