



**Corporate Parenting
Strategy 2021 - 2024**



Where **every** looked after child in Camden has a sense of belonging and is supported to make the most of their lives

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Foreword

Co-Chairs of the Corporate Parenting Board



Councillor Angela
Mason, and;



Councillor Jenny
Headlam-Wells

As part of our vision for Camden 2025 we believe that children should be given the best start in life, with every opportunity to develop and thrive. Our services are designed specifically to achieve this vision and support children to stay with their families whenever possible.

In Camden our number one priority will always be the safeguarding of our children and young people; ensuring that they are happy, safe and well-prepared for adult life. If ever we suspect harm or potential danger, we take full responsibility for their protection. This sometimes means finding them another home where their security and sense of belonging can be assured.

When a child comes into care, the council becomes their corporate parent and in Camden we expect everyone, in every agency and across every service, to go the extra mile to safeguard our looked after children and young people. This means ensuring that they are at the centre of our work and have all the support they need.

We know that there is no greater responsibility than as a corporate parent to our looked after children. The majority of young people in our care are there because they have suffered abuse or neglect, experienced bereavement or have come to Camden as unaccompanied minors. Whatever the reason, if there's a need for alternative care, we'll provide safe and secure care accommodation within a family home.

Our commitment is to deliver well-rounded support services that respond to the changing needs of our children and allow them to achieve their full potential. We believe in an empathetic relational model and design our services around the needs of children. We also recognise that each young person has a unique identity that requires tailored support. This means listening, learning and constantly challenging ourselves to improve as corporate parents.

Where possible, we do everything we can to help young people stay safe and at home with their families. We're fully committed to building resilience in families and shaping our services to provide better methods of early intervention. We will always support parents to keep their children safe and ensure they have the best chance in life.

Introduction

Corporate parenting refers to the collective responsibility of all elected members, council staff and partner agencies to provide the best possible support and safeguarding to children in care.

Camden's Corporate Parenting Board brings together all these people and provides a welcoming forum for our children, foster carers and care leavers to discuss and influence the full range of services available to them.

This strategy outlines our priorities for supporting looked after children and sets a framework for the council and partners to be held accountable on their promises. Delivery against our commitments will be monitored diligently by the Corporate Parenting Board. Members will listen to young people and check that they are happy and healthy, receiving a top quality education and have access to training and employment opportunities, as well as their own home to go to when the time comes to live independently.



Our relational approach means we engage directly and routinely with our children, their carers and social workers, encouraging them to share experiences so that we can better understand the issues they face and adapt services to meet their needs. Our young people also give regular feedback through their statutory reviews, the Young Inspectors' report and the Children in Care Council.

Children's experiences will always form the centre of our approach in Camden, with the foundations of this strategy set by young people. Our priorities respond directly to The Camden Promise – a list of commitments to children and care leavers, developed and agreed by the young people themselves and endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Board.

This strategy also builds on the findings from Camden's Building Equal Foundations Report, which looked into the disproportionate effects of Covid-19 in our borough. The report found that race and identity are pivotal factors in an unequal society, with significant implications on the outcomes of young people. In response, we have identified five priorities, each of which focuses on children's experiences and compels services to make sure young people feel safe and secure in voicing their issues and concerns.

These experiences need to be heard, considered and acted upon, with the council and partners systematically checking themselves for prejudice and bias.

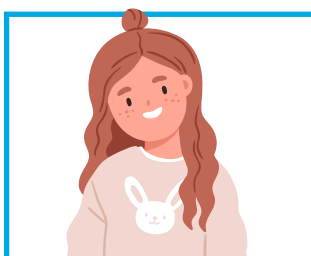
We are proud to have such a diverse group of looked after children in our care and will actively encourage everyone to feel confident and proud of who they are, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, sexuality or social background. Whatever their circumstances or characteristics, all our young people will receive complete support to make every success of their lives.

In Camden we understand that each young person has a unique history and vision for the future. This strategy seeks to ensure that their vision becomes a reality - every child must be supported to reach their full potential, with no one left behind.



Camden's Looked After Children

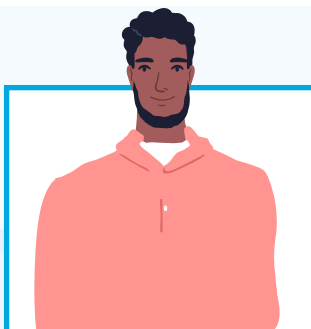
In Camden we have a relatively small and stable looked after children population, which is notably diverse in make-up. In recent years the numbers of older children and those from Black and other ethnic backgrounds have increased, partly because of a rise in unaccompanied asylum seeking children who make up more than a quarter of the looked after population (27%).



There were **190 children looked after by Camden as of March 2020**. The Camden looked after rate (**36.5 per 100,000**) was lower than the national (65) and inner London (56) averages. A trend dating back to 2013/14.



Age - Most of our young people in care are aged 10 and above, with the 16+ age group being the largest cohort (**50%**). This is a slight decrease since 2018/19, but still remains higher than national (**24%**) and inner London (**36%**) averages.



The majority of our children are from Black, Asian and other ethnic backgrounds (83%), there are significant overrepresentations from Black African, Pakistani, White Irish, and other ethnic and mixed backgrounds. This is partly because of the relatively large amount of unaccompanied asylum seeking minors.



102 children ceased to be looked after during 2019/20. **22 (21.6%)** had been in care for less than 6 months and **55 (53.9%)** had been looked after for a year or more. The number of 16+ young people leaving care was significantly above inner London and national averages.



65% of our looked after population are male. This is a slight decrease since 2018, and higher than national (56%) and inner London (59%) averages.

Camden's Looked After Children



In 2018/19 academic year, Camden looked after children achieved **Key Stage 1** levels above national averages in maths and reading. Our children at **Key Stage 2** were in line with national children in care averages for maths and reading, but lower in writing.



Substance misuse has increased over the last 5 years

- Partly as a result of improved identification at early stage and offering an appropriate intervention at that point.
- For the fifth consecutive year, 100% of children with an identified issue received an intervention.



In 2020, the average **Attainment 8 score for Camden Looked After Children increased for the fourth consecutive year to 34.5**. This compares to the 2019 national scores (19.1), inner London (21.8) and for non-looked after children (44.6).



The percentage of **Camden Care Leavers in education, training or employment aged 19, 20 and 21 in 2019/20 is 67.7%**, which represents an increase of 6%, compared to the previous academic year and is significantly above national (56.8%) and inner London (57%) averages for 2018/19.



At the end of academic year 2019/20, **93.4% of pupils were attending a 'good' or 'outstanding' school**, compared with 90.6% of pupils in 2018/19 and 78.6% of pupils in 2017/18.



Camden's proportion of children in residential placements as at end of March 2019 was 44.2%, higher than national (14%) and inner London (19%) averages in the same period. Camden also had a lower proportion of children placed with foster carers (51.1%) than national (72%) and inner London (71%) averages.

What our young people have told us

Every year a team of young inspectors carry out inspections of services provided by partners to safeguard children and young people. These involve meetings, questionnaires, focus groups and a full report to explore and document the views of children, parents and carers. Staff and managers involved in the delivery of these services are also consulted and interviewed. What young people tell us shapes the work of the Corporate Parenting Board and how we deliver our services. Some of the key themes, ambitions and recommendations from our young inspectors in recent years are given below.

Consistency of staff is likely to help young people to engage their social workers, counsellors, mentors.

Promote supportive relationships between adolescents, their peers and families.

Help young people to build resilience and find coping strategies.

Develop a wide range of community-based interventions with families.

Train social workers and foster carers, including in the use of social media by young people and associated risks of exploitation.

Train social workers to recognise the signs of trauma experienced and provide trauma-informed approaches.

Ensure timely availability of services to access support and the right length of support.

Hear the child's voice. Provide help to children and young people to enable and encourage them to express their wishes and feelings.

By developing an emotional vocabulary at primary school age can ensure children are able to express feelings later in life.

Be aware of different cultural attitudes towards mental health and how different cultures may not recognise the symptoms.

Continue giving young people opportunity to participate with interventions and having opportunity to influence plans and decisions.

Reduce the number of meetings as they can be overwhelming for young people.

Importance of good family relationships for the emotional wellbeing and mental health of young people.

Professionals should take a collaborative approach to mental health and work with young people to find the right support.

Local partners should be well trained to give, support information and advice.

The Camden Promise

The Camden Promise is a list of commitments developed by young people and children's services decision makers to ensure that all our children in care and care leavers get the right services and support. As corporate parents, we want our young people to do their best and make a success of their lives. We commit to checking each of our promises once a year through the Corporate Parenting Board, allowing time and space for children, young people and corporate parents to assess our performance against our agreed priorities.

We promise that Camden's looked after children and young people will get access to all the services they need. They will have a stable home life and good relationships with carers, family and friends. We will make sure that they:

Are fit and healthy

Keeping them in good health and making sure health professionals work together to understand their problems, and provide the right support in a way that meets their specific needs.

Stay safe from harm

Doing all we can to look after our children and protect them from harm. Making sure they know where to go to for help and that carers, social workers and teachers support them.

Have a good education and enjoy life

Giving our children the support they need to do well in education, training and helping them to enjoy their interests and hobbies.

Can have their views heard and make a difference

Making sure that our young people are involved in the decisions made about their lives when in care and finding ways to help them have their say. We want to know what our young people think about the support they are given and the services we provide.

Are ready for independence

Giving our young people the support needed when leaving care and preparing them for independence the best way we can up to the age of 25.

Our priorities for looked after children and young people, 2021 – 24

We have shaped our priorities based on the feedback from our children, young people and foster carers, what we already know about our looked after population, and the commitments we've made through The Camden Promise. This section sets out each priority in turn, highlighting the themes for improvement and how we intend to achieve success. It aims to ensure our children are happy, health and secure. It also outlines our ambitions to make placements right for young people, ensuring that carers, social workers and support staff provide the best care for our children and young people to flourish.



Mental and Physical Health and Wellbeing

Safety and Permanency

Education and Employment



Race and Identity

Where every child has a sense of belonging and is supported to make the most of their lives

Independence

Race and Identity

Our children, young people and care leavers will feel confident and assured in who they are, have their voices heard and be empowered to make a difference.

Race and identity, including gender, sexuality, religion and disability, are fundamental considerations when safeguarding our young people's health and wellbeing. In Camden we seek to ensure that all our young people can voice their concerns, be their best selves and feel confident in who they are. Every child must be able to make a success of their lives regardless of their personal characteristics.

Our Building Equal Foundations Report revealed many striking factors that affects our Black, Asian, and other ethnic communities disproportionately that have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. These groups are more likely to suffer from a mental or physical health condition, more likely to be disadvantaged with learning resources and more likely to live in overcrowded households. The Black Lives Matter challenge further highlighted systemic racism in society and reinforced our responsibility to tackle racial disparities and deliver our ambition to become an anti-racist service.

We also know how important it is to support our young people who identify as LGTBQ+ and we are working to improve our data collection and tailor support so that every child feels comfortable and assured in who they are. We

also recognise the clear links between deprivation and those who come into care, and vow to tackle inequalities and disproportionality in all their forms. **We are committing to:**

- Improve our equality data collection and monitoring, address the gaps and understand why certain groups are overrepresented in care – tackling the determinants without homogenising their experiences. We will also continue to monitor the effects of Covid-19 and ensuring vulnerable groups are not disproportionately impacted.
- Support our young people who identify as LGBTQ+ and understand the intersections with race, gender, disability and sexuality. We commit to be active allies and remove barriers so that all our young people can feel safe and thrive.
- Embed a trauma-informed working practice whereby our staff and partners are trained to address the specific needs of our Black and unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Staff, carers and support workers will actively address race and challenge their own biases when working with young people.
- Create safe spaces for young people to speak

freely, finding the right balance, without prejudice. Promoting strong relationships with people that understand them.

- Understand the difference in outcomes for our young people based on their characteristics and provide interventions to avoid negative pathways. This includes having a lens on race and identity throughout all work and priorities.
- Give our young people the opportunity to have their voices heard and make decisions about their care, including helping to interview and train social work staff. They will be given information and guidance on what their rights are, what support services are available and how to get help from an advocate or make a complaint.
- Be sensitive to the cultural needs of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and help them to settle. We will work with the Red Cross to support safe contact with their family and friends both in the UK and in their native country.
- Monitor our performance as corporate parents to our Black children through regular engagement with foster carers and young people; obtaining routine feedback and reporting to the Corporate Parenting Board.

Mental and Physical Health and Wellbeing

We will educate our young people to encourage a happy and healthy lifestyle, making sure that professionals work together to ensure that all their health needs are met.

We know that entering the care system can be difficult, particularly when it comes to mental health. As corporate parents, our number one concern is the physical and mental wellbeing of our children and young people.

Often our children have had tough starts in life and many unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors have experienced the trauma of being separated from their families and communities. We also know that young people from Black, Asian and other ethnicities have experienced systemic racism in society and were disproportionately affected by Covid-19.

Being happy and confident in identity is a key factor in looking after our mental wellbeing, particularly when it comes to race, sexuality, disability and gender. It's therefore crucial that we encourage our young people to be comfortable in who they are and demonstrate sensitivity and inclusivity of difference in order for our young people to thrive.

Based on what we know around mental and physical health and what we've heard from young people, we commit to do the following:

- Provide a holistic health and dental assessment within four weeks of a child entering care, and annually thereafter (or six-monthly for Under 5's). Our health team will listen to their problems and understand their needs, reviewing their physical health, growth and development.
- Mental health staff will attend initial health assessments to ensure any emerging mental health difficulties are identified early. Those with specific needs will be offered support from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) even if they live outside Camden.
- We will educate our young people and encourage a happy, healthy and active lifestyle, providing free access to leisure facilities. Maintaining an open dialogue about all aspects of their health; from healthy eating, exercising and staying safe, to sexual health, smoking, alcohol and substance misuse.
- We will ensure that no one misses out on healthcare, with regular assessments to help identify need. We'll encourage all young people to attend their assessments by offering flexible arrangements and virtual appointments if preferred. Medical appointments will be kept even if the young people live outside of Camden.
- We will work to understand the effects of race and identity on mental health and wellbeing, ensuring a trauma-informed approach. All unaccompanied asylum-seeking children have access to a psychologist and receive the right local support that is sensitive to their cultural background.
- We will identify young people with substance misuse issues and intervene early to provide all the support they need.
- We will ensure that information about our young people's health is kept confidential and only shared with the people who need to know, such as their carer and doctor.
- We will address and tackle the specific inequalities faced by young people with disabilities.

Education and Employment

We will champion our young people and help them succeed in education and training, supporting lifelong learning and the pursuit of their interests.

Ensuring that our children in care and care leavers are in good education, employment, apprenticeships and training will always be a priority for us as we know they offer the greatest opportunities for our young people to build a successful career. This includes making the necessary adaptations for our young people with special education needs or disabilities, to ensure they also have an equal chance to succeed.

All our young people are unique and have different interests and hobbies. These provide fantastic opportunities to release stress or frustrations, improve mental wellbeing and feel connected to something they love. Therefore, in Camden, we will always maintain high aspirations for our young people and help them to make the most of their talents.

Our Building Equal Foundations report found that young people from Black, Asian and other ethnic backgrounds are disproportionately impacted by Covid-19, tending to have lower predicted grades at school and less access to digital devices and employment opportunities. This is totally unacceptable and we recognise the urgent need to remove the barriers that prevent our looked

after children, in particular those from Black and other ethnic backgrounds, from achieving everything they want in life. **We commit to:**

- Continue our close partnership working with the Virtual School, which ensures monitoring, support and advice for young people throughout the year.
- We'll ensure all children and young people achieve their full academic potential and make the most of their talents, whilst targeting support to those from Black, Asian, and other ethnic backgrounds.
- We will identify any Special Education Needs (SEN) and meet these needs through an Education Health Care Plan or other SEN support - helping our young people overcome barriers to education attainment.
- We will continue to analyse correlations between race and educational attainment and employment, ensuring our approaches address disproportionality in attainment.
- We will help all our young people to achieve their potential through education, training and good quality employment:

- Making sure they have a place at a good school or college and attend regularly through daily Welfare Calls, same day follow up on concerns, maintaining weekly attendance data and investigation of the reasons for school absence.
- We will guarantee that every young person has access to digital devices, study resources, tuition and a high quality Personal Education Plan. They will also have excellent support from a Designated Teacher at their school.
- Ensuring our care leavers have a Pathway Plan that has clear information about what support is available once they leave care, go to university or undertake vocational training and apprenticeships. Also connecting them into training, coaching and other opportunities through Good Work Camden.
- Ensuring that children and young people, particularly those from abroad, are ready to engage in learning. Providing emotional support and encouragement through mentoring.

Safety and Permanency

All of our children and young people will be safe from harm, with stability provided through secure placements and excellent carers.

Camden works hard to ensure the right support is provided at the right time so that children can remain with their families. We always celebrate our family successes, however, if concerns about safety or wellbeing persist, swift action is taken to ensure the child has a safe and secure place to live - even if this means having to go into the care of the Local Authority. We have a duty to ensure to ensure our young people have a safe place to stay, a commitment which is also set out in our Homelessness Strategy.

As corporate parents, we listen to and train our carers to have all the tools they need to be the best carers to our young people. We also understand the importance of support networks and make sure our young people have adults that they can rely on and provide as much stability as possible.

We know that uprooting children from their homes or having to change placements can be tough, so we work hard to find long and suitable placements for our young people that will allow them to flourish and make a success of their lives.

For children who need long term care, **we commit to:**

- Provide young people with a safe home to live with carer who are suitable and well trained. Young people will be happy and taken care of, and only moved again if absolutely necessary.
- The Care Pathways Panel will ensure that social work plans are child focused, culturally informed and consider the perspectives of partners in health and education.
- We will continue to help our children find stability, build trust with professionals and identify risks early to avoid young people entering the criminal justice system.
- We will give our young people all the information we can about their new placement, carers and area they will be living. They will be given information about the support available from youth services, including on education, training and careers.
- Ensure continuity of care for our young people so that they maintain a sense of stability and do not experience too many different professionals.

- We'll draw on the rich experience of our foster carers and enable them to provide best possible care for looked after children and young people.
- We will continue to challenge ourselves to offer the best services and develop our approaches. Such as:
 - Family Group Conferences, Early Help and Mediation which continues to make a direct contribution to the reduction of young people placed in our care.
 - Continuing to explore family and friend placements in order for children to return to family and not remain in care for longer than necessary if appropriate.
 - Continuing our work with Life Long Links, a scheme supporting young people to identify significant people in their lives who can have an ongoing role in their journey to adulthood.

Independence

Our young people will be prepared for the world of work and supported to become active citizens when they leave care. They will be prepared for independence in the best way possible.

With an increased proportion of adolescent children entering care and an older cohort of looked after children with complex needs, there is a growing requirement for specialist residential placements that can prepare our young people for adult life and independence.

In recent years there has also been a growing awareness of contextual safeguarding risks for young people in care, including sexual and criminal exploitation. When considering these risks, we also recognise the need to target specific support to unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors, who are likely to have very limited local connections.

Alongside the support from social workers, residential workers, health, education and CAMHS, the Camden Pathway Service has been designed so that young people remain living in the borough where they grew up, in placements where they have access to a complete wrap around support, all while developing their independent living skills. This model has been recognised as good practice by National Leaving Care Advisory Service and has been replicated by other local authorities.

In Camden we listen carefully to our care leavers and assess their needs to make sure they have all the services required for a successful transition into adult life. This includes making sure they have suitable accommodation while preparing for independence. **In order to do this we commit to the following:**

- We will make every effort to help young people remain living with their foster carer after 18 and up to the age of 21 if they wish to do so – called “staying put”.
- Once a young person leaves school, we will help them to make the most of their opportunities in training, further education and employment. From the age of 18, they will have a personal advisor to help them to become independent. Care leavers can continue with this support up until the age of 25 if they wish to do so.

- We will ensure our care leavers are given as much help as possible to find suitable housing. Our housing allocations scheme gives care leavers who have can manage a tenancy, the ability to bid for a one bedroom flat in Camden. Once secured, they will be supported to move and settle into their new home, with provisions made to ensure they’re happy, safe and are able to sustain the tenancy.
- We will help our care leavers learn the practical skills needed to live independently, such as managing budgets and applying for jobs. We will not expect them to leave care before they are able to move on.
- We will implement the Camden Model of Social Work and develop an integrated adolescent approach. We’ll also continue to take guidance from the Young Inspectors reports, with a focus on quality of services, including the mental health and emotional wellbeing of adolescents.
- Young people will continue to receive advice as they gain independence; developing personal resilience as they journey into adulthood.

Taking this strategy forward

Relationship between our priorities, the Corporate Parenting Board and our young people

Each year the Corporate Parenting Board will receive a range of reports and updates to give them insight on the support provided for our looked after children and young people. They will examine the reports in line with the stated priorities and ensure that Camden's service offer is delivering the best possible support for young people, highlighting any specific areas for additional focus. Young people's experience will always remain at the heart of this process.



Corporate Parenting Board	Priority	Ongoing action, interaction and involvement
Corporate Parenting Annual Report	All priorities	Every year the Corporate Parenting Board will produce a report which provides an overview of the achievement, progress and challenges in meeting the needs of Camden's looked after children and care leavers who are placed both in borough and outside the borough. The report also sets out the priorities for each year.
The Young Inspectors' Annual Report	All priorities	Each year the Young Inspectors will produce a report focused on a particular topic. In recent years this has included mental health and wellbeing, working with vulnerable adolescents, and young people with disabilities. The report will give recommendations to be implemented by the Council and local multi-agency partners, with delivery to be overseen by the Board.
Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report	All priorities	This report works alongside The Corporate Parenting Annual report and gives an overview of the Looked After population and comments on key successes and challenges, along with plans for the next years.
Annual Health Report of Looked After Children in Camden	Mental and Physical Health and Wellbeing	This report outlines the delivery of health services to Looked After Children in Camden, reviewing performance indicators, clinical work undertaken by the LAC Health Team, service improvements and plans for further development. The Corporate Parenting Board will use the report to identify any emerging challenges or areas of concern that require particular attention, and if necessary commission further updates.

The Virtual Head's Annual Report	Education and Employment; Independence	Members of the Board have continued to take an active role by attending the Virtual School's Annual Achievement Awards and the Foster Carers Annual Awards Evening.
A report on Corporate Parenting of Black, Asian and other ethnic Looked after Children and Care Leavers	Race and Identity	<p>The Board recognise that for our Black, Asian and other ethnic Looked after Children and Care leavers, racism and inequality is a part of their daily lives. They are also disproportionately represented in our care population.</p> <p>This annual report will respond to the Board's commitment to challenge these inequalities, provide opportunities and be the best Corporate Parents for our Looked After Black, Asian and other ethnic children and young people.</p> <p>As an integrated looked after children and care leavers service we are committed to reviewing our equalities data and taking forward the action plan to become an anti-racist service, where all our children and young people have the opportunity to thrive and have good sustainable outcomes. All meetings and priorities should have an oversight of race and identity.</p>
Camden Foster Carer Charter and Agreement	All	<p>Review and maintain the Foster Carer Charter, recognising the value that Camden's foster carers play in providing excellent care and support to our looked after children. This should strengthen the council's partnership with Camden Association of Foster Carers (CAFC) and ensure that they are involved in developing the fostering service.</p> <p>Ensure that our foster carers get the respect, recognition and praise that they deserve. Offering a range of support, advice and training in line with the Foster Carer agreement.</p>
Camden Fostering Statement of Purpose	Permanency	<p>This document provides a description of private fostering arrangements within Camden and provides a clear guide to the service for professionals, the public, council members and external organisations.</p> <p>This includes assessment processes and the support and advice offered to private foster carers, privately fostered children and their parents, within Camden.</p>
Camden Adoption Statement of Purpose	Permanency	<p>The aims of this statement is to give all stakeholders and service users a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the Permanence Team in Camden.</p> <p>The adoption service is now provided by Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), Adopt London North. All other aspects of permanency, including kinship fostering, long-term fostering and Special Guardianship assessments and support are managed by the Camden Permanence Team.</p> <p>The statement will cover work provided by the Camden Permanence Team and respond to the emerging Permanence Strategy.</p>