

	<h2 style="text-align: center;">Children and Education Overview & Scrutiny Sub-Committee</h2>
Title	Corporate Parenting Reports
Date of meeting	6 June 2024
Report of	Executive Director for Children’s Services
Wards	All
Status	Public
Urgent	No
Appendices	Appendix A – Corporate Parenting Annual Report Appendix B – Fostering Report Appendix C – Independent Reviewing Service Report Appendix D – Virtual School Report Appendix E – BOP Report Appendix F – Draft Corporate Parenting Strategy
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<h3>Summary</h3>	
<p>The reports provide an update on activity and performance of Children and Families, Education and Health services for 2023-24 to demonstrate the progress that is being made on delivering against Barnet Council’s pledge to the children in our care and care experienced young adults.</p>	
<h3>Recommendations</h3>	

1. That the Children and Education Overview & Scrutiny Committee is asked to note and comment on the reports presented.

1. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 1.1 The services providing care and support to the children in our care and care experienced young adults prepare the annual reports that set out the activity, performance and achievements of services and most importantly of the children and young adults. As corporate parents, the councillors must be kept informed on how the services are meeting the wholistic needs of the children and young adults.
- 1.2 Our children in care and care experienced young adults have over the last year continued to show such impressive motivation and resilience as they face a complex world that is harder than ever to navigate. Our Corporate Parenting responsibilities across the whole council has continued to strengthen over the last year with even more collaboration with colleagues across the council and partner agencies in Education, Health and the voluntary sector. We have seen progress in placement stability despite the significant national challenges in placement sufficiency, permanency planning for our very young children has been timely with court timescales improving and for our older children work experience projects have expanded. Education outcomes continue to improve despite our children having lost so much learning during the pandemic and our local offer for care experienced young adults demonstrates the partnership working that is delivering on our Independent Living Programmes with Education, Housing, Revenue and benefits, the Live Unlimited Charity and Adult Services. We are very proud of what services have achieved for our children and young adults but that would not be possible without the strength of the child and young person's voice that directs us to develop services and opportunities that respond to them and show that what they say matters.
- 1.3 In June 2021 Ofsted completed a focussed visit looking at service to children in care and highlighted two areas of social work practice that need to improve: Case recording, including the recording of supervision, visits and direct work with children and the rationale for decision-making on placements and the completion and quality of 'All About Me' plans. In response to these recommendations, we have consistently audited case files to identify examples of good practice and highlight where improvement is needed. Team managers and auditors have worked alongside practitioners to ensure that information from the audits inform practice, and the case files effectively represent the excellent practice that teams are producing.
- 1.4 The Corporate Parenting Annual Report (Appendix A) sets our progress against the 6 Barnet pledges made to our children in care and care experienced young adults.
 - Support you to fulfil your dreams
 - Be there for you, when you need us
 - Support your mental and physical health
 - Listen, communicate and make decisions together with you
 - Support you to become independent and prepare for adulthood
 - Celebrate you, your achievements, identity and culture
- 1.5 The Fostering Report (Appendix B) informs on the recruitment activity that is ongoing to increase the number of Barnet foster carers, the support that is in place for our foster carers and initiative being worked on to improve the capacity to ensure that when children cannot remain with their family they are placed locally, in the right place first time.
- 1.6 Every child who is in our care has an independent reviewing officer assigned to them and they work alongside the child, the carers and the professional network to ensure that the child's needs are fully

understood, that their care arrangement is appropriate and meets the needs and provides an independent view on the progress of the care planning in place for the child. The report attached (Appendix C) gives the overview of this work for the last year. The Independent Reviewing Service is managed within the Safeguarding, Quality Assurance and Workforce Development Service to ensure that the Independent Reviewing Officers' (IRO's) input and contribution to social work practice and care planning for children and young people is distinct from case holding service areas. The Head of Service has a direct line of accountability to the Executive Director of Children's Services: they meet regularly to review any practice concerns independently.

1.7 The Virtual School is the key educational advocacy service for all children in care (CIC), whether educated in Barnet or placed out of authority. The focus of our statutory duty is to improve educational outcomes through challenging and supporting schools, academies, and specialist settings to ensure that CIC:

- Attend school on a full-time basis.
- Receive the best possible opportunities as learners by accessing mainstream education or where appropriate specialist or alternative provisions and through attending schools which are judged to be at least good in Ofsted inspections.
- Maintain at least expected rates of progress relative to their starting points on becoming looked after.
- Close the achievement gap with their peers

Consistent progress is being made to improve the educational outcomes and the Virtual School Report (Appendix D) informs on these achievements.

1.8 Barnet's Children in Care Council is for all children and young people who have experience of being in care. Barnet's Children in Care Council was named by the young people as 'Barnet on Point, #BOP and they meet throughout the year to talk about their care experience and variety of topics relevant to what is happening for them as young people in care but also in the wider community. This report (Appendix E) sets out how we have been engaging, listening and acting upon the voice of children and young people in our care during 2023/24.

1.9 The Draft Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024-27 (Appendix F) provides an overview of what we will continue to provide, what we will focus on and how we will measure outcomes over the next three years. Our priorities are based on our 6 pledges and will endeavour to further strengthen all areas of service delivery to children and young people. The draft strategy will be subject to consultation with our children and young people over the next two months before it is finalised and presented to Cabinet.

1.10 Some of the areas of focus will be;

- Lobbying Government to agree 'protected characteristics' status for care leavers.
- Working across the council and with our partners to increase the number of work placements and apprenticeships available to ensure a comprehensive offer of education, employment and training.
- The recommissioning of strong advocacy options with you, to ensure children always have the opportunity to have their say and that it effectively informs decisions for them. We will ensure we meet all our advocacy duties to children in care and care experienced young people and ensure consistency of approach and accessibility.
- Developing a Kinship Care policy promoting and supporting family arrangements.
- Ensuring sustained improvement to the timeliness of Initial Health assessments and dental checks
- Embedding the multi-agency mental health transitions panel that will include a referral pathway for children aged 17.5 into adult services.

- We will continue to champion children in our care via #BOP and aim to encourage as many young people as we can to take part by offering a broader range of activities as chosen by them.
- We will work in partnership to ensure the voices of our children and young people are acted on in all areas of service development and staff service events. In particular we will focus on the voices of children on DOLS orders or secured as they are a marginalised group.
- Continue to creatively develop training options for migrant young people awaiting their status and promoting our Borough of Sanctuary accreditation for UASC.
- Co-producing with young people activities and celebration events to reflect the diverse identities, such as a cultural expo that focuses on food, culture and history from countries across the world.
- Delivering on the Care Leaver's Parenting Pledge to ensure that care experienced parents receive the necessary support, interventions and advice to enable them to be effective parents.
- Ensure that we celebrate our children and young people, acknowledge their achievements and respect their culture and identity always.

2. Alternative Options Considered and Not Recommended

2.1. None

3. Post Decision Implementation

3.1. None

4. Corporate Priorities, Performance and Other Considerations

Corporate Parenting

- 4.1 In July 2016, the Government published their Care Leavers' strategy Keep on Caring which outlined that the " [the government] will introduce a set of corporate parenting principles that will require all departments within a local authority to recognise their role as corporate parents, encouraging them to look at the services and support that they provide through the lens of what a reasonable parent would do to support their own children.'
- 4.2 The corporate parenting principles set out seven principles that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and young people, as follows:
- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
 - to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
 - to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
 - to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
 - to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
 - for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and;
 - to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living

Risk management

- 4.3 Any Family Services risks are recorded on the Family Services Risk Register and monitored each quarter by the Senior Leadership Team with escalations to CMT if necessary.

Insight

4.4 Family Services uses a comprehensive suite of performance information, as part of its self-assessment and to support decision making and, including local and regional datasets, audit and financial analysis. This information is scrutinised by Senior Leaders in a variety of forums including Placement Board, Performance Board, MTFs Board and quarterly meetings with the Lead Member for Children and Families, and the Chief Executive.

Social Value

All commissioning activity includes social value as a standard monitoring item.

5. Resource Implications (Finance and Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT and Property)

5.1 None in the context of this report

6. Legal Implications and Constitution References

6.1 Local authorities have specific duties in respect of children under various legislation including the Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004. They have a general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need in their area and, if this is consistent with the child's safety and welfare, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families by providing services appropriate to the child's needs. They also have a duty to promote the upbringing of such children by their families, by providing services appropriate to the child's needs, provided this is consistent with the child's safety and welfare.

6.2 They should do this in partnership with parents, in a way that is sensitive to the child's race, religion, culture and language and that, where practicable, takes account of the child's wishes and feelings. Under the Children and Families Act 2014, local authorities must consider how the child or young person can be supported to facilitate their development and to help them achieve the "best possible educational and other outcomes".

6.3 Local authorities have specific duties to care leavers under the Children Act 1989 as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The corporate parenting duties and powers under the 1989 Act include:

- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
- to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
- to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
- to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
- for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and,
- to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living

6.4 Under the Barnet Constitution Part 2 C, the Children & Education Overview and Scrutiny Sub- Committee shall perform the overview and scrutiny role and function in relation to:

- All matters as that relate to Children's Social Care
- All matters which relate to services pertaining to the education and well-being of children and young people including youth services.

- Receive and comment upon any external inspections and reviews.

6.5 The 2010 Equality Act outlines the provisions of the Public-Sector Equalities Duty which Page 11 of 12 requires Public Bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.
- advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups.
- foster good relations between people from different groups.

6.6 The broad purpose of this duty is to integrate considerations of equality into day business and keep them under review in decision making, the design of policies and the delivery of services.

Equalities and diversity considerations are a key element of social work practice. It is imperative that help and protection services for children and young people are sensitive and responsive to age, disability, race and ethnicity, faith or belief, sex, gender reassignment, language, maternity / parental status, and sexual orientation. We continue to closely monitor this, as report appendixes notes, in our performance data.

7. Consultation

7.1 My Say Matters is the Family Services consultation and participation programme for children and young people.

8. Equalities and Diversity

8.1 Decision makers should have due regard to the public sector equality duty in making their decisions. The equalities duties are continuing duties they are not duties to secure a particular outcome. The equalities impact will be revisited on each of the proposals as they are developed. Consideration of the duties should precede the decision. It is important that Cabinet has regard to the statutory grounds in the light of all available material such as consultation responses. The statutory grounds of the public sector equality duty are found at section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 and are as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:

- Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

The steps involved in meeting the needs of disabled persons that are different from the needs of persons who are not disabled include, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities.

Having due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:

- a) Tackle prejudice, and
- b) Promote understanding.

Compliance with the duties in this section may involve treating some persons more favourably than others; but that is not to be taken as permitting conduct that would otherwise be prohibited by or under this Act. The relevant protected characteristics are:

- a) Age
- b) Disability
- c) Gender reassignment
- d) Pregnancy and maternity
- e) Race
- f) Religion or belief
- g) Sex
- h) Sexual orientation
- i) Marriage and civil partnership

9. Background Papers

9.1 None

