



**Corporate Parenting Annual Report:
April 2022 - Nov 2023**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the services provided to Camden's Corporate Parenting Services and to set out our strategy for continuing to meet the needs of our children in care and care experienced young people as their corporate parent.
- 1.2 The statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services states that the Council has a responsibility to act as effective and caring corporate parents for all Children Looked After and Care Experienced Young People. Simply put, the term 'corporate parent' refers to the collective responsibility of all elected members, staff, and partner agencies to provide the best possible support and safeguarding for this cohort and to support their transition into adulthood. This involves an absolute commitment that our children should achieve in education, they live in stable homes where they receive love and care and are ready for independence as they mature into adulthood.
- 1.3 Camden's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-2024 sets out our vision to ensure that our children and young people have the best opportunities in life regardless of whether they live in Camden or outside the borough.

The strategy is underpinned by our Camden promise, a list of commitments developed by young people and children's services decision makers to ensure that all our children in care and care experienced young adults get the right services and support.

'We promise that Camden's 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:

- I. Are fit and healthy.
- II. Stay safe from harm.
- III. Have a good education and enjoy life.
- IV. Can have their views heard and make a difference.
- V. Are ready for independence.

- 1.4 The strategy embodies our aims as a corporate parent to be a borough where **'every child looked after by Camden has a sense of belonging and is supported to make the most of their lives.'**

This is underpinned by 5 priorities:

- **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'.

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

1.5 The co-chairs and elected members on the Corporate Parent Board continue to demonstrate a commitment to, and active engagement with our children and young people. They have taken a leading role in the Virtual School awards, an opportunity to celebrate the educational achievements of our children and young people. They have maintained a relationship with our foster carers through consultation events and young people through the Child in Care Council.

1.6 The context however has been one of considerable change and uncertainty both for our local services and nationally. Our work has continued to be shadowed by the pandemic, which has had an impact on the wellbeing of children, families, and staff. All Services are now delivered face to face as they were during the pandemic albeit it is accepted that COVID 19 has had an impact on the mental health and wellbeing of children and their families leading to some being more isolated and thus presenting with more acute needs. The Court system has also been delayed with proceedings exceeding the expected 26-week timescale. Over the past year, there has been an increase in larger sibling groups presenting to the service primarily due to experiencing chronic neglect. and the challenges of maintaining relationships when we are physically isolated and access to services have been restricted.

We continue to see the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and the impact that this has had on household incomes and on services. The cost of care has also increased during this period with a continued projected overspend on the overall budget at circa £3.1million.

2 PROFILE OF CAMDEN'S LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN POPULATION

2.1 Who are our Children Looked After (CLA) and care experienced young people? What our data tells us.

At the end of March 2023 there were 197 Looked After children in our care. As of the end of November 2023, this number is at 207 and predicted to end at an upward trajectory in April 2024. Since April 2023, 86 children have come into our care.

This is broadly consistent with the previous year (207) and equates to a rate 57.1 children looked after per 10,000 children aged under-18 living in Camden. This is an increase of 5.2 since March 2022 (52.3) but continues to be below the rate for statistical neighbours and nationally.

Figure 1 - CLA numbers (April 2022 to March 2023)

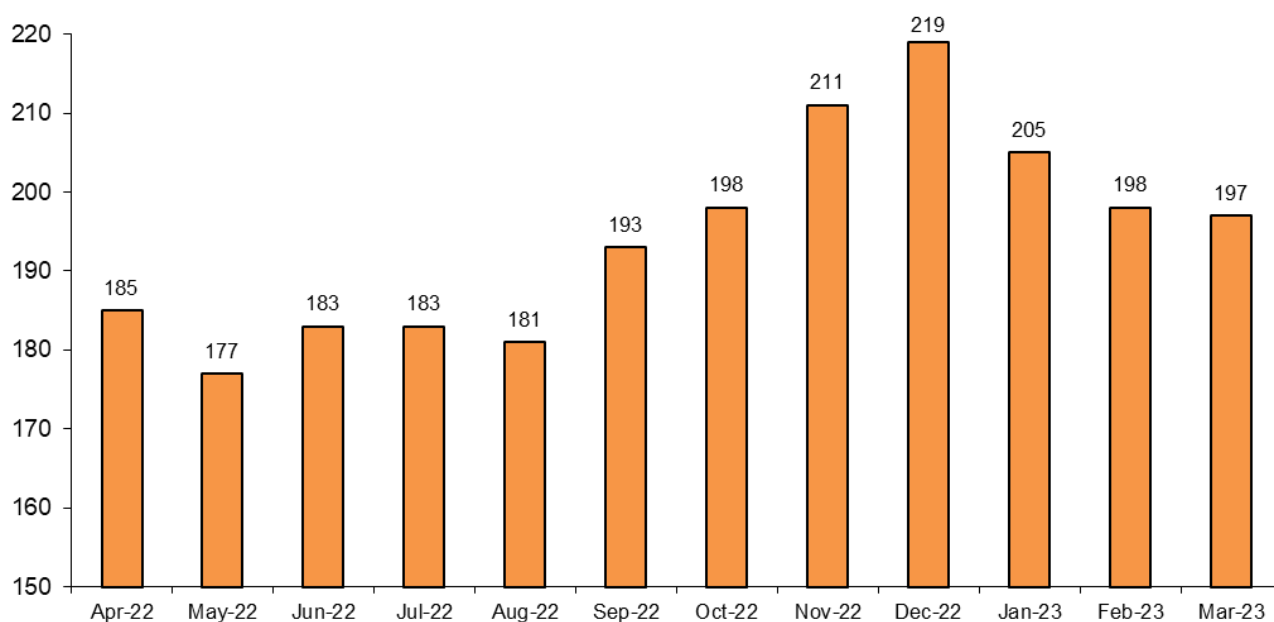
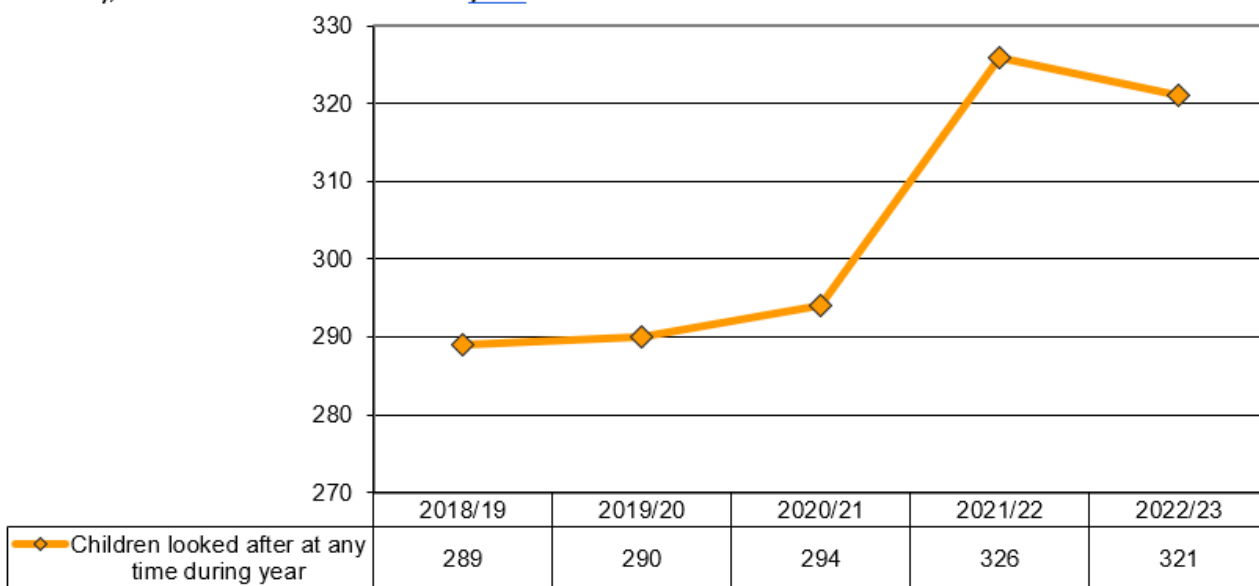


Figure 2 Number of Children Looked After – 2018-2023

The following chart shows the total number of children looked after during the period (including children who ceased to be looked after), in each of the last five statistical years



2.2 Who is coming into care?

Although our total Looked After numbers have remained relatively stable, more children are coming into care than leaving care over the course of a year.

Between April 2022 and end of March 2023, a total of 321 children were looked after (including children who ceased to be looked after), very similar to 2021/22, but higher than in the prior 3 statistical year periods.

- Since April 2023, 86 children have come into our care and the projection figure is 130 for this period.
- 131 children started to be looked after, except for the prior year (2021/22), this was the largest intake since 2012/13.
- 9 less children started to be looked after during 2022/23 than the previous year.
- The average monthly number of children starting to be looked after in 2022/23 was 10.9 children, slightly lower than in 2021/22 (11.7 children).

Most children in our care have experienced abuse or Neglect and are subject of public law orders.

Figure 3: Legal status of Looked After children

	Brief Intervention Teams	Children and Young People with Disability Service	Family Intervention teams	Looked After Children teams
Interim Care Order (section 38)	0	0	11	52
Full Care Order (section 31)	0	2	0	51
On remand	0	0	0	1
Placement Order (section 21)	0	1	0	6
Emergency Protection Order	0	0	0	0
Accommodated (section 20)	1	1	9	62

Table - CLA legal status per team

2.2.1 58.9% of children looked after at end of March 2023, were subject of an interim or full care order, with 37.1% accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989. The remaining children were subject of an emergency protection order, placement order or on remand. The percentage of legal status remains largely the same at the end of November 2023.

2.3 The number of new entrants to care who are Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) decreased.

Although the overall number of children looked after shows little change from the previous year, the number of unaccompanied minors becoming looked after decreased; 34 unaccompanied minors became looked after during 2022/23, compared to 62 during 2021/22. As of the end of November 2023, there were 39 UASC with only 18 becoming looked after since April 2023.

2.4 The age profile of children becoming looked after has changed.

In 2022/23, the age profile of children becoming looked after by Camden showed a significant decrease in the 16+ category alongside increased proportions in the other age categories, but particularly the 10-15 age category.

The proportion of children becoming looked after by Camden in the 16+ age category has been higher than national average since 2011/12. In 2021/22, 51.5% of children becoming looked after by Camden were aged 16+, which was much higher than inner London average (41%) in same period. The high proportion of children becoming looked after by Camden between 2011/12 and 2021/22, who were aged 16+, can be attributed to the large number of unaccompanied minors who became looked after during the period and their age profile, for example in 2021/22, of 72 children becoming looked after by Camden and who were aged 16 or older, 56 were unaccompanied children (77.8% of all children aged 16+ becoming looked after).

2.5 We have a predominantly male cohort of children in care.

The proportion of male children looked after by Camden has decreased slightly from March 2022 (66%) to March 2023 (61.9%) but remains higher than national and inner London averages. This trend can in large part be attributed

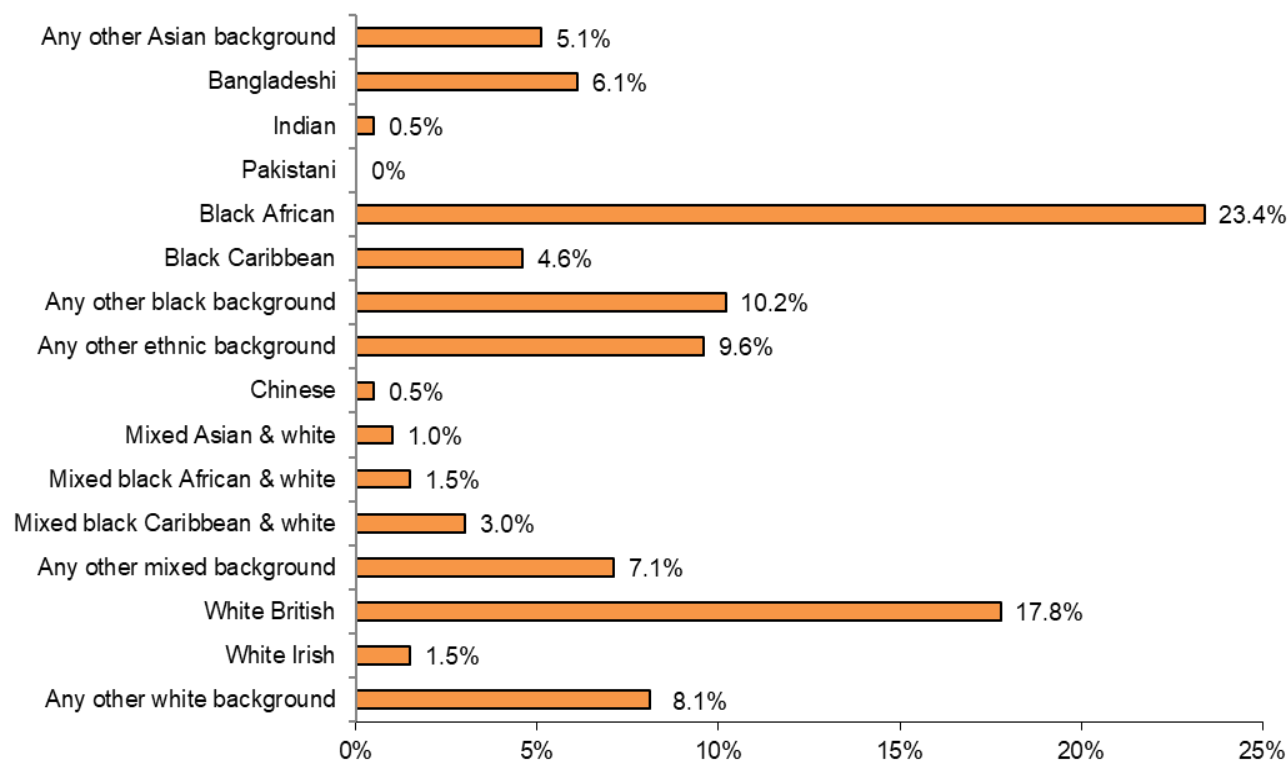
to the high intake of unaccompanied children in recent years, who are predominantly male.

2.6 Children looked after ethnicity.

A significant majority of our children and young people are non-White/UK backgrounds 83.8% of our children looked after on 31st March 2023 were from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

The following chart shows Camden’s CLA population at the end of March 2023 by specific ethnicity:

Figure 4 – Looked After Child ethnicity



2.7 Almost a quarter of our children looked after came into care as unaccompanied and separated minors in 2022/3. Although this figure has now corrected for 2023 with only 18 UASC presenting in this financial year.

Of the total 197 looked After children, 47 (24%) were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in 2022/2023. Thus far the population is 207, with 19% being UASC.

By country of origin: 13 from Afghanistan, 4 from Albania, 2 from Algeria, 1 from China, 8 from Eritrea, 3 from Ethiopia, 2 from Iran, 2 from Iraq, 1 from Kuwait, 4 from Morocco, 1 from Somalia, 4 from Sudan, 1 from Syria and 1 from Vietnam. 46.8% of UASC are from African countries, with 44.7% from Asian countries, and 8.5% from European countries.

**2.8 We have a small and decreasing proportion of White children in our care
This group has had the greatest proportional decrease since end of March 2019.**

The following chart shows Camden’s Looked After population at the end of March 2023, categorised by banded ethnicity, compared to end of year figures for the previous four years.

Table 1 –Children in care banded ethnicity (5 year trend)

	31.03.2019	31.03.2020	31.03.2021	31.03.2022	31.03.2023
Asian	9.4%	10%	9.6%	8.9%	11.7%
Black	36.6%	36.3%	35.8%	35.6%	38.1%
Mixed	13.1%	14.7%	14.4%	13.6%	12.7%
Other	9.9%	6.8%	10.7%	12.6%	10.2%
White	30.9%	32.1%	29.4%	29.3%	27.4%

We continue to report to the Corporate Parenting Board on our Pledge to be the Best Black Corporate Parent. Since making the pledge, we have launched a Replenish Box which enables carers to focus their conversations on race and ethnicity needs of our children by starting with conversations on skin and hair care which can then be developed to other aspects of their identity such as food, holidays, and cultural celebrations. All children receive a box when they come into care, and this is replenished through their period in care by the social worker.

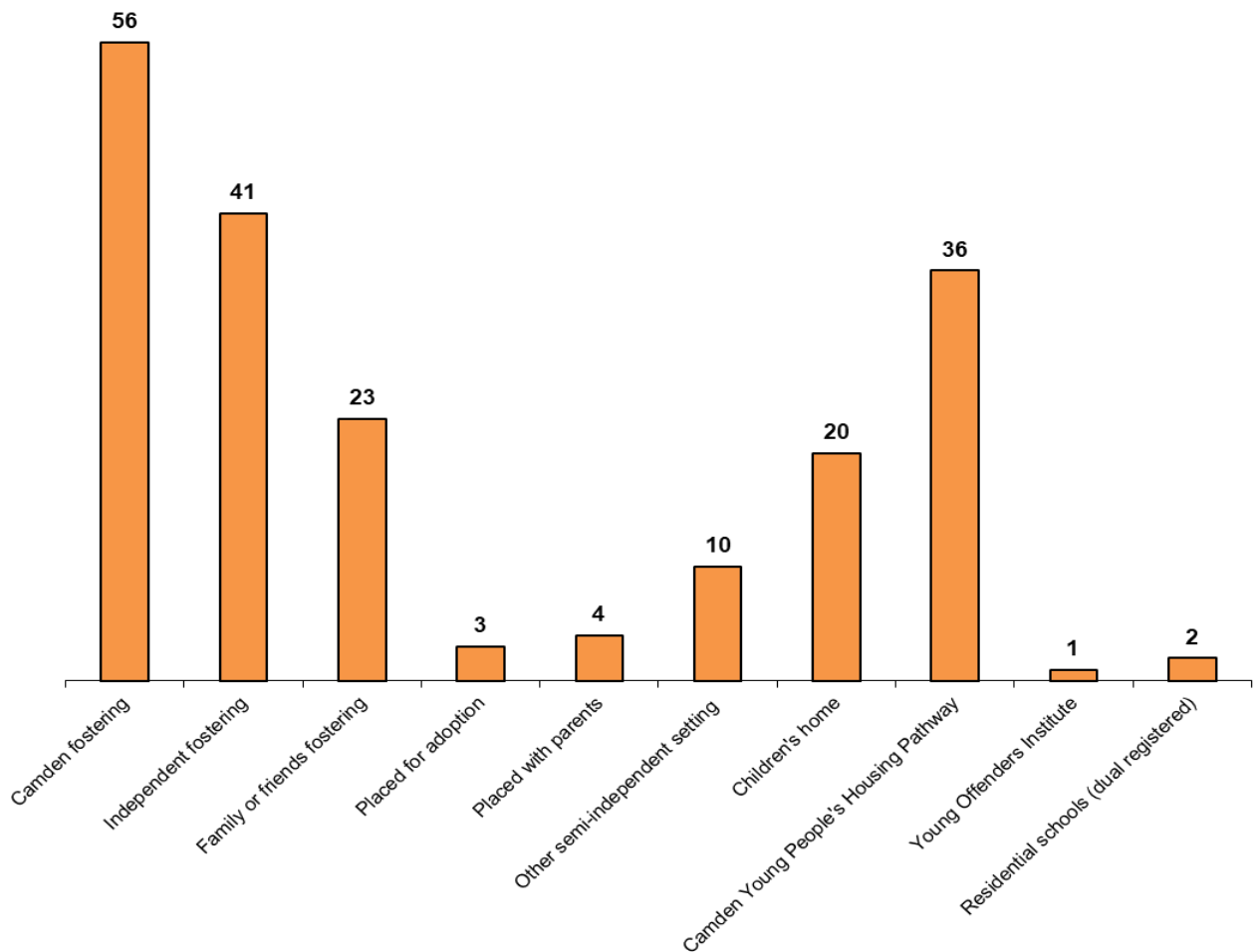
2.9 Care Leavers

On 31/03/2023 there were 361 care leavers allocated to the service. At the start of December 2023, we were providing a service to 342 young people. The decrease in number is an expected trajectory with some young people aging out and others deciding that they do not need continued support of a pathway plan or their personal advisor. Although, this happens, young people continue to access personal advisor support maintaining relationships beyond the age of 25. The age profile of our care leavers evidence that a high proportion of care leavers continue to be allocated in the service beyond their 21st birthday. 43% of our total care leaver population were aged 21 or over. Almost 50% were previously UASC.

2.10 Where do our children live: Placement and placement stability

Camden seeks to provide a range of care placements for children and young people. We work with our professional networks to agree whether family and friends / kinship care, foster placement, residential placement or supportive living accommodation is the right option for each child at that time. The following chart shows the number of Camden’s LAC in various placements provided at the end of March 2023, broken down by placement type.

Figure 5: Placement types for Camden Children Looked After: March 2023



2.10.1 Children looked after on 31st March 2023 were in the following placement types:

120 children (60.9%) were placed with foster carers, of which:

- 56 were Camden carers
- 41 were carers from independent/voluntary agencies, or other local authority carers
- 23 were relatives or friends

3 children (1.5%) were placed for adoption

4 children (2.0%) were placed with parents at home

70 children (35.5%) were placed in residential settings, of which:

- o 36 were Camden Young People's Housing Pathway
- 20 were in children's homes
- o 10 were in other semi-independent settings

- 2 were in a residential school which is dual registered as a children's home
- o 1 was in NHS or other medical provision placement
- 1 was in a Young Offender Institute

2.10.2 Of Camden children looked after at end of March 2023 (aged under 16 and in care for at least 2.5 years), 68.5% had been in their placement for at least 2 years. Whilst this is an increase from previous year (63%).

2.10.3 The proportion of children with 3 or more placements (in the previous 12 months) remained unchanged during 2022/23 at 9% (also 9% in 2021/22) and is closely comparable to the national (10%), inner London (11%) and statistical neighbour (9%) averages for 2022/23.

Maintaining children and young people within Camden enables us to 'wrap round' CAMHS support from our co-located team.

2.10.4 At the end of March 2023, 58.9% of Camden looked after children were placed outside of the Camden local authority area, a decrease from end of March 2022 (62.8%), although a little higher than end of March 2020 (52.1%) and March 2021 (55.6%).

However even where out of borough our children remain close to Camden with 71 children (36.0%) looked after by Camden at end of March 2023 in placements within other London local authority areas, and just 45 (22.8%) children placed in local authorities outside of London. 82% are placed within 20 miles of home.

The above measure is a snapshot figure captured as at the end of 31st March. The current figures indicate a slight increase in young people who have experienced instability which is reported at end of November 2023 at 13% which indicates an increase although this number may decrease based on those in care. It is normal to have fluctuations through the year on this measure. This figure is now above the 2023/23 national and statistical average.

3 IMPROVING OUTCOMES – KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND AREAS FOR FOCUS

3.1 Ofsted

The Inspecting Local Authorities Children's Services (ILACS) Inspection of Camden local authority children's services took place from 25 to 29 April 2022 with the report published in July 2022 with an overall judgement of 'Outstanding' for Children in care and care experienced young people and the views and recommendations of the inspection inform this report.

'Children in care and those who look after them have high aspirations for the future, regardless of the complexity of children's needs. Children receive exceptional care and support and are protected decisively from harm when required (Ofsted, 2022).'

3.2 Supporting and Promoting the Health of Looked After Children

Emerging from the pandemic a few of the statutory health checks were maintained in 2022/23 year. It was noted a considerable improvement in these statistics in 2021/22 year which has continued this year. Information is as follows:

- 99% of children had an up-to-date health assessment (continued at same level as 2021/22)
- 78% of children had an up-to-date dental check (this is a 1% drop from 2021/22 of 79%).
- Of Camden children looked after for a year or more at end of March 2023, an average of 88.5% had both an up-to-date health assessment and dental check (it was reported 89% in 2021/22)
- Immunisations – 73% of children looked after for a year or more at end of March 2023 had all required immunisations (this is a slight improvement from 2021/22 being 69%). This represents the considerable work between Health, social workers, and carers to sustain positive outcomes following the pandemic, including the 'Healthy Smiles' initiative to support Looked After children to be prioritised for dental care.

3.2.2 Substance misuse

Of Camden children looked after for a year or more at end of March 2023, 5.2% were identified as having a substance misuse issue, a decrease from 2019/20 (16.5%), 2020/21 (13%) and 2021/22 (8.5%). For the eighth successive year,

100% of children and young people with an identified issue were offered and received an intervention.

Substance misuse screening is undertaken on all looked after children as part of the child and family assessment, using the Drug Use Screening Tool. All those identified as requiring a service are referred to FORWARD, Camden's drug and alcohol service for young people referred. The primary reason for referral is cannabis use with alcohol being the second most prevalent.

3.23 Emotional and behavioural health

All looked after children receive a yearly screening of their emotional well-being and those with specific needs are offered a service from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Of the 64 children aged 4 to 16 who had been in care for at least 12 months at the end of March 2023, carers returned 62 fully completed questionnaires (96.9%) almost unchanged from 2021/22 year (96.5%).

Of the 62 completed questionnaires, the mean value of the total difficulties score was 16.3. A score of 0 to 13 is considered normal, 14 to 16 borderline and 17 to 40 is classified as above normal. This falls within the 'borderline' range.

Work has continued across Health and the Looked After service to consider how Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs), are being used and the results inform the service children receive. This offered assurance that all children whose scores fall within the high range and many with lower scores are receiving a CAMHS service.

In year data indicates a slight decline in November 2023. The service is working to identify where there have been delays in securing immunisations and health checks for children. Initial analysis appears to indicate that this has been linked to social workers attempting to secure parental engagement and consent for immunisation. It has been clarified to social workers where the local authority holds a care order, the practice will be to immunise after a couple of attempts to engage the parents in this process and not to delay immunisation. There is also a small proportion of UASC who take some time to come up to schedule with immunisation or may need more support before they access dental care.

3.3 Supporting Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC)

Figure 6: proportion of all Children Looked After who were unaccompanied and separated children and former UASC: 2019-2023

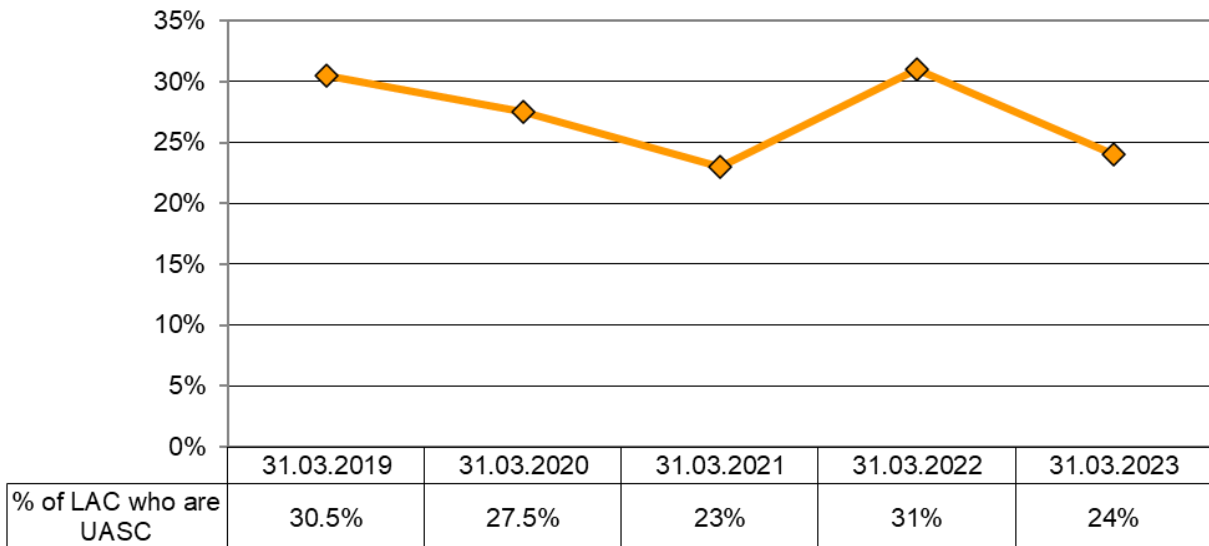


Figure – CLA unaccompanied asylum-seeking (and former UASC) children (5-year trend)

The number of children and young people presenting in Camden as UASC decreased during 2022/23, and these children now make up just under a quarter of cohort and this is now at 19% as at the end November 2023.

There has been a commensurate development of our practice, skill, and expertise.

- a) A specialist project manager was recruited in September 2023 with a focus on working with unaccompanied children and former UASC progressing their immigration status, safeguarding, health, education, and wellbeing. This now enables us to have all UASC cases across the system having established this is a better way of delivering the service rather than having a pod which we piloted in 2022/3.
- b) Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are co-located allowing for collaborative work in this area which requires specialist knowledge and a sensitive therapeutic approach due to the specific trauma our unaccompanied children have experienced in their countries of origin or in their journeys into the UK. We have improved our offer to UASC through with specialist CAMHS practitioner to support placements/carers, individual work, and training.
- c) We are developing our work around identity including developing skills in completing life story work with them to support integration and settlement in the UK. This includes: the use of country profiles, direct work tools and processes; the interpreting and translation of all documents including UASC assessments, age assessments, CLA Health information packs in multiple common languages; improving liaison work with Red Cross/Red Crescent or other agencies to contact families.
- d) CLA Health / CAMHS give advice at the Initial Health Assessment setting out emotional, physical needs that would be unique to the experience of

UASC and trauma they have experienced including support around sleep hygiene and clinics for some traumatised young people.

- e) We are compliant with the Merton guidance, take a cautious approach to screening assessments to be confident that children are not being wrongly designated as adults.
- f) We have been able to provide appropriate accommodation for the young people presenting promptly and have been successful in completing initial health assessments and ensuring education is provided based on the young person's needs.
- g) We are providing training to equip the workforce with knowledge, skills and tools when identifying and responding to UASC (including Home Office, End Child Prostitution and Trafficking (ECPAT), and joint borough training with LB Islington).
- h) We track the immigration status for all former UASC and ensure Human Rights Act assessments are undertaken for all young people with All Rights Exhausted status.

3.4 **Keeping children safe and protected.**

Reducing offending and criminalisation of Looked After children and Care Experienced young people.

There has been a further reduction in the proportion of Looked After Children were cautioned or convicted of criminal offences to 6.4 % 2022/23 from 10 % in 2019/20 and 15% in 2020/21. We currently have two young people who have entered care directly on remand this financial year. None of our long term CLA have committed serious offences requiring a custodial sentence in this financial year although there was one in the previous year who has since been rehabilitated back in the community.

We have been closely monitoring our Missing children with strengthened procedures around strategy meetings, Return Home Interviews and identifying young people experiencing or at risk from Sexual Exploitation (CSE) or Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE).

We have been part of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) pilot, particularly alert to the specific risks that impact on our UASC and the association between exploitation, substance misuse and mental health difficulties.

Risks faced by children in care are recognised and responded to promptly and effectively. The response to children in care who are at risk of exploitation or to those who go missing from care is extremely strong and has a discernible and positive impact on their protection and outcomes (Ofsted, 2022).

3.5 **Supporting and promoting the Education of Looked After Children**

Camden Virtual School (VS) promotes the education of looked after children by focussing on the 3 As:

- Admission into the best and most suitable educational provision for the child or young person.
- Attendance at our children's educational provision is rigorously monitored and a multi-agency group formulates an Attendance Plan for those who fall below 90% attendance in school. A Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) Panel scrutinises and advises on 16+ participation in education.
- Attainment and progress are monitored to ensure the school is holding high aspirations for each child and young person. Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) is used to improve educational attainment and reduce any gaps in learning.

3.6.1 Key figures Over 2022/23:

- a. 94% of pupils were attending a 'good' or 'outstanding' school, which is on a par with the previous year.
- b. The average Attainment 8 score of in 2023 for Camden Children Looked After increased slightly to 17.46 compared to 16.25 in 2021/22.
- c. The overall attendance of school age Camden Looked After Children was 88.4%, which was down from the previous year's 90.5%. The Persistent Absence figure for 2022/23 (local data) is 15.2% which is comparative to 2021/2022.
- d. In 2023, 21% of Camden care leavers were not in education, employment, or training. This is a reduction of 8% compared to 2022 and is significantly below the national average of 38%, the average of 31% for our statistical neighbours and the inner London average of 31%. Camden is ranked 3rd amongst local authorities in England.
- e. The proportion of Camden care leavers who were in education, training or employment aged 19, 20 and 21 during 2022/23 has increased substantially since 2021/22 and is much higher than national, inner London and statistical neighbour averages for 2021/22.
- f. 100% of the 3 Level 3 learners in the eligible cohort progressed onto the second year of their A Level course.
- g. 20 of the total 22 Year 12, Level 1 Learners (90.9%) achieved a PASS in their Level 1 courses.

These are exceptional results, given the complex needs and experiences of many of our children and the high proportion of new UASC.

Their achievements were celebrated at the first face to face Virtual School awards celebration since the start of the pandemic which took place this year at London Zoo, a happy event that was well attended by carers, social workers, and children. In 2023 Autumn, this event took place at the British Library and was again a successful event with children and young people's progress being celebrated.

3.7 Achieving permanence for children.

We are successful in keeping children out of the care system using Family Group Conferences (FGCs), our mediation service and Public Law Outline (PLO) and have very few children in care under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 (S20). S20 denotes a shared agreement between the child, parent and local authority about entry into care as opposed to when the local authority initiates care proceedings. Wherever possible, children are reunified with their families.

The data above highlights that despite continuing care proceedings, the number of children Looked After on care orders is declining, very few of those are younger children and most are of secondary age.

Whilst most children (under the age of 16) come into care through public law proceedings, due to risk of significant harm through neglect or abuse, most of these children do not remain in our care. Once children come into our care, we are successful at obtaining family placements through Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) and Child Arrangement Orders, or where there is no safe family option, through adoption.

In 2022/23, at the conclusion of proceedings, 13% of children remained in our care under a Care Order. A further 8% of children had a plan of adoption (Care Order and Placement Order as their outcome). 29% were subject to a Special Guardianship Order and the remaining children remained in their family of origin under Supervision Orders or other private law orders.

3.8 Care proceedings

Court delays have continued into 2022/23 impacting on social work capacity, placement availability as well as impacting on progress in achieving permanence for children. We continue to track each child in proceedings monthly with a 6 monthly 'deep dive' into longstanding proceedings. Over the past year, the most longstanding cases have concluded or been listed for a final hearing.

The deep dive highlighted issues with:

- Court timetabling/availability for contested hearings,
- Delays in expert assessments
- Family members presenting late into proceedings.
- Parental Mental Ill Health resulting in the need for the Official Solicitor

The family court issued new guidance in December 22 called 'Making Cases Smaller' with a drive to increase pre proceedings work, divert families from court, and if court processes are required, that we reduce the number of assessments and required hearings. This was implemented to help tackle the challenge of case duration and court availability. We have implemented these recommendations and increased our applications to court via the pre-proceedings route from 33% in 21-22 to 58% in 22-23.

We currently have 86 children in care proceedings, comprising of 45 families. The position on final orders in year at end of quarter 2 indicates that 55% of care proceedings have ended with Supervision Orders, meaning that children have been returned to the care of their parents with 15% ending in SGO's and 11% ending with Care Orders/Placement Orders. While the in-year comparators may not reflect the end of year picture, there will be a need for further analysis on outcomes to consider if care proceedings could have been avoided in the first place.

3.9 **Adoption**

There has been an increase in the number of adoptions and SGOs over 2021/22 (4 adoptions and 23 SGOs). This success is continuing with 6 adoptions and 5 SGOs finalised by October 2022.

Improved matching and identification of suitable placements on entry to care and access to local placements reduces placement breakdown.

- Between receiving a placement order and matching the child with an adoptive family, Camden on average took 139 days which was the second shortest average time in inner London and within the statistical neighbour cohort.
- Between children entering care and being placed for adoption, at an average of 334 days, Camden ranked third within both inner London and the statistical neighbour group.
- Between children entering care and the local authority receiving a placement order, Camden took on average 257 days, which was the ninth best result amongst inner London authorities and fifth within the statistical neighbour group.

Strong performance in the adoption process is supported by appropriate identification and timely assessment of prospective adopters. Camden also promotes a system of early linking of children with prospective adopters to ensure timely match and placement, in conjunction with rigorous tracking and efficient application to court for the adoption order. Family finding is a key aspect in securing a permanent placement for a child and the past year has evidenced a continuing strong working relationship between the regional

adoption agency Adoption London North (ALN) and Camden social workers to achieve this.

3.10 **Fostering and residential care**

Where children continue to be in our care, we work to ensure they are matched with families who reflect their needs and identity.

Recent audits evidence that most of our Looked After children are settled and stable in placements and we manage transitions sensitively.

Children only come into care if it is necessary and appropriate for them to do so. The vast majority of children are given placements that are suitable and meet their needs. There is careful matching of foster carers and children, and children's cultural and other identity needs are very well considered (Ofsted, 2022).

On 31st March 2023 there were 74 approved fostering households registered with our in-house provision (including 14 kinship carers) offering a total of 123 placements.

79 children were placed with Camden foster carers on 31.03.2023.

The recruitment and marketing for foster carer applicants has continued and there has been an increase in online advertising via Facebook and Instagram and through an update to the fostering website.

In the last year Camden recruited 8 fostering households including a parent and child fostering household. We received 229 fostering enquiries which exceeded the target of 150. We are currently on track to recruit 16 new foster carers by April 2024. Although this figure is slightly below our target, we continue to identify the full 20 for the year albeit accepting 4 would now have their assessments completed in the next financial year.

The Fostering team have worked closely with Camden Association for Foster Care (CAFC) to consider how to both attract new carers and to support and retain our current carers.

This is a standing item at Corporate Parenting Board meetings and at annual foster carer consultation events.

Successful initiatives include:

- a) A retention scheme providing a reward payment to carers at time-served milestones (2, 5, 10, 15 & 20 years)
- b) Additional 'cost of living' payments have been made to carers, given as a £250 lump sum (equivalent of £50 each month for 5 months).
- c) Council tax reduction for out of Borough carers – between 50-66% (this is already provided to Foster Carers' living in Camden)

- d) 'Replenish 'hair and skin care boxes designed and created for black foster children and to support white carers of black foster children. The next stage is to support this with monthly blog and videos to help carers make best use of the boxes in exploring culture and identity of children in our care.
- e) The ring doorbells that were recommended by CAFC to the Council had now been distributed to carers.
- f) New fostering rates, which has also allowed us to be much more competitive within the market and new age band to provide incentives to foster older children.
- g) There is also now parking in borough for foster carers attending contact or other social work meetings for children and easing challenges with pick up and drop off to schools or health appointments.

Camden has made progress in a series of initiatives to address sufficiency and increase the availability of local placements, including providing larger homes, exempting foster carers from paying council tax, as well as increasing fees and allowances.

In Summer 2023 the Foster Carer Awards took place with Sally Joseph Award for an outstanding contribution to corporate parenting being awarded for the second time.

Allowances for Foster Carers and Special Guardians have been reviewed in line with national guidance and now provide enhanced rates for older children.

3.11 Care Experienced Young People Service

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 places specific duties on local authorities about children in care and care experienced young people including to provide a Personal Advisor for all former relevant children up to the age of 25 on request. This is to provide advice and support, a needs assessment and pathway planning to meet their needs including any support to pursue education and training.

As detailed above, we continue to provide an Outstanding service to our care experienced young people and are supporting 342 young people as at the start of December 2023. Young people work with personal advisors (PA's) and are seen regularly. The outcomes for the cohort remain high and we are due to present a paper to Cabinet at the end of January asking for care experienced to be made a protected characteristic. Alongside this, we are working with

'Care leavers predominantly live in suitable and safe accommodation. Reciprocal arrangements with other local authorities mean those living out of Camden have access to appropriate accommodation options. The peerless stepped approach provided through the housing pathway is helping care leavers to live independently in their own accommodation at a time when they are ready to do so' (Ofsted, 2022).

national charities such as Become and Family Rights Group to develop our offer of support.

When children in Camden leave care, they are well supported by their personal advisers (PAs) in a service that is aspirational for them. There are a wide range of services available for care leavers to meet their needs. The care leavers service is rooted in relational practice, which means that PAs build warm professional relationships and show pride in young people's achievements. Care leavers report that their relationship with their PA inspires them to succeed. (Ofsted, 2022)

3.11 Camden Care Leaver Internships

As corporate parents we needed to practice being the best corporate parents by developing opportunities within the Camden family. We have had seen improvement in our key performance indicators in education, employment, and training opportunities.

- a. **Summer 2023 – 6 Care experienced young people appointed to Camden Care Leaver Internships.** This was offered by Camden Apprenticeship Team supported by Post 16 Camden Virtual School.

Start date: September 2023.

- No experience required, just a willingness to learn.
- £22,432.00 p.a.
- 18 months, start September 2023.

Six Full Time Camden Council Internships offer support in these areas:

1. Refugee Support
2. HS2 rail development
3. Human Resources
4. Mental health and special needs services
5. Participation and Communications

b. **Education Employment and Training**

Camden's 2022/23 education, employment, or training (EET) for 19, 20 and 21 yrs. was 70.5%, in comparison to 2021/22 data for the same cohort which was 61.5% - **An overall improvement in Camden EET for 19, 20 and 21yrs of 9%.**

The 2022/23 education, employment or training for the same cohort National average was 56 %, Camden was **14.5% higher than the National average for EET.** Inner London EET for the same period and cohort was 64% which again Camden achieved 6.5% higher.

c. **In touch**

Proportion of care leavers aged under 21 with a visit within required timescale, in November 2023 was 80%. Proportion of care leavers aged 21 or older with a visit within required timescale during the same period was 93%.

Proportion of care leavers aged 19, 20 and 21 years old who were in touch based on (OC3 reporting) 92% in 2022/2023. Proportion of care leavers all ages covered by return who were in touch (OC3) 84.5%.

d. Supporting transitions/ Joint working at 16+

In 2022 our work around transition was further developed by allocating a personal advisor to work alongside the social worker and the young person from the age of 17 ½, this was to ensure that the personal advisor could take an active role in the pathway planning process.

This year we have exceeded this by allocating all our young people aged 16+ to a personal advisor. The personal advisor is active in attending CLA reviews, home visit with the social worker, encourage the young person to visit the care experienced drop-in. Early allocation to a personal advisor is supportive to the young person and to a seamless transition process as they start to develop a relationship and build trust by the time the young person reach age 18 and they are solely allocated to the personal advisor.

e. New areas of development

i. Young people in custody

We have developed a support package for Care Experienced young people in custody. Information from the care experienced young people conference and following up with the guidance document and the details in the Barnardo's research we had a better understanding of the disadvantages faced by young people in care in the prison system and the double disadvantage if they are black. Based on the views of care experienced young people in custody we acknowledged that we needed to do more. As a service we were not offering our young people additional visits while they were in custody, they were receiving the same as if they were in the community. On reflection we acknowledged that they needed additional visits as some can face isolated when they are in custody. We currently have 10 young people in custody. These numbers have remained relatively low and stable for the past few years. Some of their sentences exceed the time they will be open to us and where this is so, we are working to identify services who can continue to provide support beyond their 25th birthday. In some instances, PA's or managers have agreed to be the lifelong link for these young people to support their exit from custody.

Our support package ensures that young people have a phone when released from custody if needed, new trainers and tracksuit, essentials, money for a haircut, new ruck sack and most importantly safe suitable accommodation to reside. The planning for release will be discussed over a 6–12-month period to prepare the young person for their transition back into the community and to have services on hand to support them through the initial weeks and months with education, training and employment, mentor,

and appropriate referral to support services. During the period the young person is serving their custodial sentence better working relationships will be formed with the prison and probation officers and work collectively to support the young person. Developing a better working relationship with probation will also support finding suitable accommodation approved by probation within a shorter timescale.

ii. Young Parents:

We have a small cohort of young people who are likely to experience intergenerational contact with Children's Services and are working to disrupt this cycle by supporting a few young people to delay parenting and access support through the Pause Project. This is a national project which works with parents who have experienced children being removed from their care by enabling them to gain better parenting skills to prevent this continuous cycle. For others, we note some care experienced young people make the decision to become parents early and are successful at doing so while maintaining other aspects of their independence. We have recently completed a survey with this cohort of mainly young mothers, who have informed us of the need of better support via parenting programmes, having access to funds to buy a cot for their babies and basic parenting books amongst other needs. We are in the process of developing a package of support for new parents to ensure that they access Family Hubs/ Early Help early and have access to a small budget to purchase necessary support. Where young people become parents before moving into their permanent accommodation, they have support in the accommodation pathway which is either 24 hours or floating support and PA's work to offer additional support around parenting.

iii. Looking ahead Care experienced young people panel.

From February 2024 we will be developing a 'Care Experienced Panel', the group will be for young people 18+. This will be a safe space for young people to come together talk about any issues of concern, offer advice, and share their views and experience. Care experienced young people should be one of the main drivers to influence service delivery which will better meet their needs.

We aim for participants in the group to include a cross section of our young people so that the group is a true representation of Camden's care population. The group will meet monthly in person but if needed additional meetings would be arranged sometimes by Teams for ease of participation. Camden aim is to be guided by the group and work alongside them in facilitating co-production to developing bespoke services for Camden care experienced young people. We look forward to giving you an update on the group in the next annual report.

4. WORKFORCE:

The Corporate Parenting Service has gone through some changes this year with the restructure. Camden has focused on building capacity in the Service by advancing the senior practitioners to managers roles to enable them to have first-hand experience and oversight of all our cases.

We are very alert to the level of secondary trauma that our social workers and PAs can experience in their direct work with children and young people and are working with CAMHS colleagues to identify support. We have also invested in induction for new staff and development opportunities for experienced practitioners e.g., through the Advanced Practitioner role, a dedicated fostering marketing officer, and specialist UASC lead.

The Fostering and Permanence Service have been amalgamated to be a single team assessing and supporting all carers as the Family Friends and Fostering Service. This is to ensure our kinship carers receive good quality support and fits with the government *Stable Homes Built on Love* Agenda while maintaining good support for our foster carers.

Development of the Advance Personal Advisor

We have created four advance personal advisor roles in the care experienced service to support our work with young people. We wanted to place more emphasis on engaging young people in a consultation forum to hear their views. One of the advance personal advisor roles is to set up and work in close partnership with young people and ensure the involvement and participation of young people in the assessment, planning and review of services.

We also wanted to focus on the independent living skills that young people need to develop to support their independent living in the community. The advance personal advisor will arrange events in consultation with young people in the drop-in to develop young people independent living skills program, and to support our most vulnerable young people who are in custody and our care experienced parents.

'Children's wishes and feelings fully shape and inform their care plans. Plans are thorough and robust and address children's wide-ranging needs. Children's plans are reviewed regularly and children are encouraged to be part of their review meetings. If they choose not to attend, their wishes are clearly presented and considered (Ofsted, 2022).

5. KEY PRIORITIES FOR 2024 AND BEYOND

- 5.1 The impact of **Covid 19** continues to influence the lives of children in care, care experienced young people and those who support them, and we continue to work to mitigate the impact of this on children and young people's health, education, safety and wellbeing.
- 5.2 A further factor dominating the potential planning for children, care leavers and carers is the **cost-of-living crisis** impacting on children, families, care providers and potentially the services available to them.
- 5.3 The focus of work for the service will be doing the basics and doing them exceptionally well. This means we shall focus on how we support young people when they enter the care system, support them to have better placement stability and plan early for their exit from care and transition into independence. To do this, we shall need to support those who care for them to do so well by developing a better therapeutic offer to build our resilience around changing market environments as well as ensuring that carers can cope with the greater needs of children and young people in their care.

- 5.4 We have recently recommissioned for 66 Shoot Up Hill and hope to open a second children's home. Our refreshed placement sufficiency strategy highlights the need for an edge of care team which will be developed this year to reduce entry into the care system.
- 5.5 Lastly our young people's accommodation pathway is up for recommissioning in 2025. To ensure that we commission for the right cohort and reduce reliance on spot purchase, we will conduct a robust needs analysis to ensure that we are commissioning for the right cohort.
- 5.6 Our continued work with other Council Departments, Councils under the London Greater Alliance (LIIA), charities such as Become and the Family Rights Group as well as aligning Council Missions such as the Youth Missions will be key in ensuring good outcomes for our children in care and those leaving care.

6. CONCLUSION

- a. We are committed to caring for the children in our care and those leaving our care as we would our own children.

'Children in the care of Camden receive an outstanding service from workers who know them exceptionally well and use these relationships to fully respond to their needs as unique individuals (Ofsted, 2022).'

The Outstanding rating from Ofsted is an acknowledgement of our success to date in doing this but also a challenge to continue to do better still, to identify and meet the needs of this diverse population of children and to offer them stability and a stable base to develop from whether they enter care at birth or in adolescence.

As a service we have identified and agreed the following 4 priorities for 2024:

- I. Getting the basics right for children – children and young people are seen and spoken to, there are SMART plans in place and their stories are recorded.
- II. Children and young people's voices inform practice, and our planning is child and family led by developing an in-care council.
- III. Recruitment and retention of foster carers.
- IV. Our practice is trauma informed and promotes children and young people's identity wherever they live.

These priorities align with, and hold us accountable for, progressing the priorities in the Camden's Corporate Parenting Strategic plan which will be renewed this year.