

COUNCIL	DATE 16 March 2022	ITEM NO 15
TITLE Annual report on Corporate Parenting	WARD (S) All	
CHIEF OFFICER Florence Kroll	CABINET MEMBER Children and Young People	
DECISION CLASSIFICATION Non exempt report	IS THE FINAL DECISION ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS REPORT TO BE MADE AT THIS MEETING? Yes	

1. **Decision required**

- 1.1 Council are requested to note and comment on the work of Children’s Services in relation to children in our care during 2020-2021 and on the areas identified for further action in 2021-2022.

2. **Links to the Royal Greenwich high level objectives**

- 2.1 This report relates to the Council’s agreed high-level objectives as follows:
- A Great Place to Grow Up
 - A Safer Greenwich

3. **Introduction and Background**

- 3.1 Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children’s Services(DCS) and the Lead Member for Children’s Services outline in their respective roles that they should: “have a shared responsibility with all officers and members of the local authority to act as effective and caring corporate parents for looked after children, with key roles in improving their educational attainment, providing stable and high quality placements and proper planning for when they leave care” paragraph 23(LMCS) 2013.
- 3.2 The Corporate Parenting Board ensures that the Royal Borough of Greenwich is a good parent to both the children in its care and care leavers. However, while the work of the Corporate Parenting Action Group has continued through the year, and regular updates have been provided to the Lead Member, due to Covid 19 the Board has not met formally.

- 3.3 Arrangements ensure that the Council is actively delivering on its Promise to young people. (Previously referred to as the Pledge) and promotes involvement from both members and officers to create positive opportunities for our children and care leavers, and to reduce the outcome gap between them and their peers.
- 3.4 It is impossible to conduct our annual report without acknowledging the impact of Covid 19.
- 3.5 While the pandemic itself has caused less disruption to children in our care than foreseen in March 2020, the measures put in place to contain Covid-19 have, almost overnight, brought about the largest transformation in practice that children's social care has ever experienced.
- 4.6 Since March 2020, our challenge has been to ensure that we continued to protect children at a time when many of our processes, systems and ways of working had to be adapted in a period of rapid and constant change and uncertainty.
- 4.7 As a child centred, values-based organisation, all changes to our activities, actions and responses were tested against the key principles in our Children & Young People's Plan before being implemented:
- Building aspiration and resilience
 - Strong and challenging partnerships that focus on the experience of the child
 - Safeguarding, education and health are everybody's responsibility
 - Involving children and young people in decision making
 - Promoting equality and combating disadvantage and discrimination
- 4.8 New Operational Guidance for staff in Children's Social Care was issued in March 2020 and was revised eleven times between then and March 2021 to incorporate learning and changing circumstances.
- 4.9 In all the guidance issued, managers and staff were reminded that they were the ones best placed to make professional judgements of risk in each case and that they should continue to:
- Place children at the heart of everything we do
 - Use professional judgement, skills and expertise to determine what response was most likely to keep a child safe, create change and be in the best interests of a child or young person

4.10 Our priority was not only to implement change, but also to ensure that while practice might look different, that the quality the safety of children was still being maintained.

4. The Promise

4.1 Each local authority makes a pledge to children in their care and care leavers. In Royal Greenwich this is called The Promise, which was developed jointly with children and young people –

Provide you with a safe and happy home

Respect you and your identity

Offer you support and guidance while in our care

Make sure you get a good education

Involve you in decisions about your life

Support you to be active and stay healthy

Ensure you feel prepared for adulthood

4.2 The Promise sets out our commitment to children in our care and care leavers and this report will review both the performance data and the activity during 2020-2021 against each of these commitments.

5. Provide you with a safe and happy home:

	March 2021		March 2020		March 2019	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of children in our care (actual)	419	-	462	-	479	-
Children in foster placements	331	79.0%	361	78.1%	357	74.5%
Children in residential placements	37	8.8%	31	6.7%	49	10.2%
Young people in semi-independent living	30	7.2%	45	9.7%	44	9.2%
Children in adoptive placements	7	1.7%	9	1.9%	6	1.3%
Children in other placements (home, custody, hospital, other)	14	3.3%	16	3.5%	23	4.8%

5.1 This table shows that Royal Greenwich has ensured that more children are able to remain safely at home as our numbers of children in our care continue to safely decrease. Some of this is can be attributed to a significant drop in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, but analysis confirms a declining trend overall. The headline figure is at its lowest for over 10 years.

The proportion of children placed in fostering, residential and semi-independent provisions has remained broadly consistent over the last 3 years. We do not have any children under 16 in unregulated provision.

Performance Indicator Description	Royal Greenwich	Royal Greenwich	Royal Greenwich	London	England
	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2019/20	2019/20
The percentage of looked after children at 31 March placed outside LA boundary and more than 20 miles from where they used to live	107/419	117/462	130/479	-	-
	25.5%	25.3%	27.1%	17.6%	15.6%

We continue to have a higher proportion of children placed more than 20 miles from their home

Performance Indicator Description	Royal Greenwich	Royal Greenwich	Royal Greenwich	London	England
	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2019/20	2019/20
Children looked after at 31 March with three or more placements during the year ending 31 March	36/419	33/462	39/479	-	-
	8.6%	7.1%	8.1%	10.4%	10.6%
Children looked after for at least 2.5 years at 31 March, in the same placement (or previous plus adoptive) for at least 2 years (under 16s)	145/184	137/185	131/189	-	-
	78.8%	74.1%	69.3%	69.8%	68.2%

This table shows that Royal Greenwich has sustained and improved our placement stability achieving a rate higher than the London and England averages.

- 5.2 Our Children’s Home has been rated ‘Outstanding’ for the last four years. It has continued to provide a safe and happy home to 5 of our children despite some Covid related challenges in relation to staff ill-health and young people’s lockdown frustrations.
- 5.3 In response to Covid we set up a temporary Children’s Home to ensure that our most vulnerable children could be protected. The Children’s Home was opened as a direct forward thinking response to the unprecedented national emergency caused by the Covid-19 global pandemic. In usual times, identifying suitable placements for children who come into the care of the Council can be challenging. With the anticipated pressure on all local authorities of a

simultaneous rising need for placements because of the impact of Covid-19 upon families and care providers it was anticipated that this would become more difficult.

- 5.4 There is limited provision available for placements at little or no notice and particularly so for adolescents and this second Children's Home offered a valuable local means to provide emergency immediate care for children unable to be with their families or for those already in our care where their current placement had broken down.
- 5.5 Keeping some of the most vulnerable children local meant that social workers have been able to maintain face to face contact with them. Young people placed in the temporary Children's Home reported that they have been happy there. The generous donation from IKEA to furnish the home, significantly reduced set up costs and the furniture has been used to refurbish our existing children's home and will furnish the proposed new residential unit. We had two positive reports from the independent visitor to the home (Regulatory requirement) – *“it is very evident that staff are working very hard to make a positive difference to the young people's lives and therefore I am satisfied that staff are ensuring that the children are being effectively safeguarded while living in the home and that the conduct of the home effectively promotes children's wellbeing.”*
- 5.6 The temporary Children's Home reverted to a supervised contact centre at the beginning of September 2020.
- 5.7 The headline adoptions indicators have continued to improve and are more positive than the most recent England outturns.

6. Respect you and your identity

- 6.1 The individual characteristics of children are integral to all aspects of our practice. Our practice is underpinned by a systemic approach.
- 6.2 Data shows that the ethnic makeup of children in our care is broadly in line with the demographics of children in RBG.
- 6.3 Consideration of identity, culture and ethnicity are routinely assessed in our quality assurance activities and shows that this is sensitively considered and respected. In the inspection of December 2019 OFSTED commented:

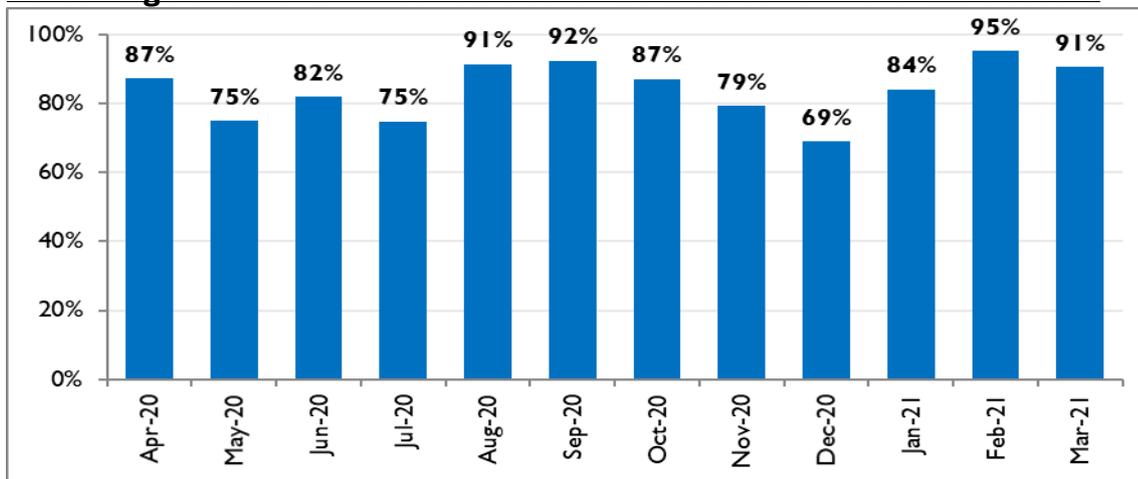
“Social workers give good consideration to family history, culture and ethnicity.”

7. Offer you support and guidance while in our care

7.1 Throughout 2020-2021 there were changes in the way in which we maintained contact with children in our care. This was underpinned by national relaxations in statutory guidance. In previous years visits would always be face to face, whereas during this year many visits have been carried out virtually. Many of our children lived with carers who were shielding, others were placed at distance or in areas with high levels of infection.

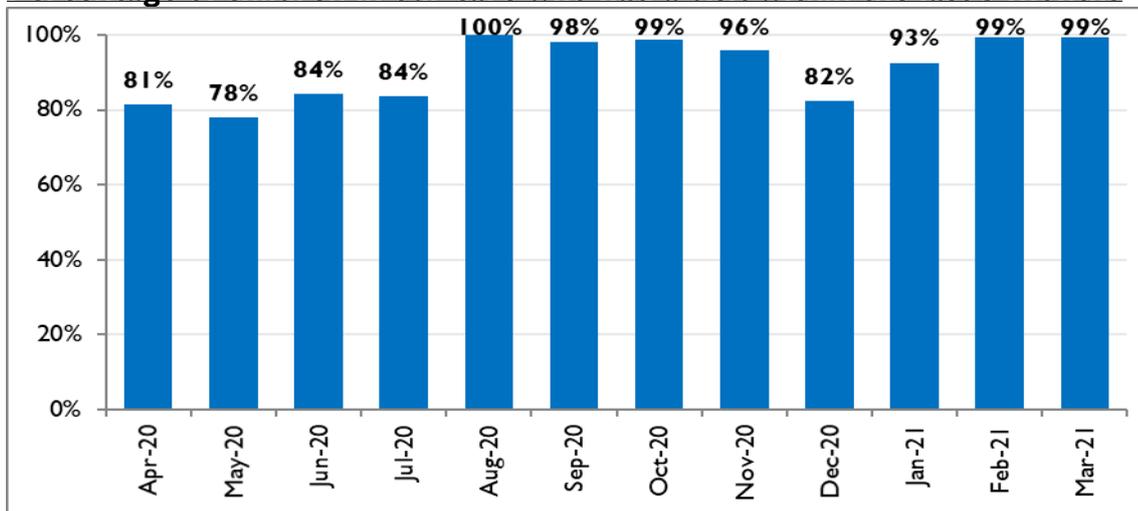
7.2 During this period we increased the requirements on social workers to maintain regular contact with children in our care and wherever higher levels of risk or need were identified face to face visits were completed.

Percentage of children in our care who had a visit within the last 6 weeks



**284 of our children in care (in March) should be receiving a visit every 6 weeks *135 of our children in care should be receiving a visit every 3 months*

Percentage of children in our care who had a visit within the last 3 months



- 7.3 These tables show that social workers have been in regular contact with their social workers. The percentage of children who have had regular contact with their social workers is consistent with previous years.
- 7.4 During 2020-2021, some children and their parents and carers have provided feedback on the support that they have received from their social workers and include:

From children and young people in our care -

“M is a great social worker and the best I have ever had.”

“Thank you so much, you’re honestly the best social worker I have ever had, and I really trust you, you have given me so many opportunities and experiences and I’m so glad that you have come into my life and you have helped me a lot.”

From parents/carers on behalf of child –

“She has spoken extremely positively of you as her social worker and the support that you offered her over the years. She has found you to be incredibly supportive and motivational and feels that the belief you had in her ability really helped her”

“D has taken to the time to meet with the YP and not just go through the usual ‘stat visit’ but also spend time playing on his computer games with him and to get to know him building a good relationship with him. On his last visit D also took the time to stay for tea with the YP and home which was really nice. He really feels he can talk to D and that he is invested and cares.”

8 Make sure you get a good education:

- 8.1 All children in our care are supported by our Virtual School.
- 8.2 Ofsted, in December 2019, described our Virtual School as exceptional:

“The virtual school is well established and well respected. The team maintains effective oversight of the educational progress of children in care, and there is a greater focus on more vulnerable pupils. Children make positive progress from their starting points at the time of entry to care. Personal education plans are highly detailed and of a consistently good quality; they are mostly reviewed each term and identify the support that each child needs. The pupil premium is used well to provide

tailored interventions in accordance with children's educational and emotional health needs. Additional support is provided through an impressive homework club, which offers a range of educational and enrichment activities, and is highly valued by both children and foster carers."

8.3 Throughout 2020-2021 the Virtual School has continued to work closely with children in our care and their carers. Children in care were seen as vulnerable children and so able to attend school throughout the Covid period. Social workers and the virtual school persistently promoted the benefits of children in our care of being in school, however this had to be approached on a case by case basis:

- For some carers having the child at school was a valuable support, for others it presented a health risk
- Some children, particularly those with social, emotional or mental health issues were very anxious about being in school
- Some young people felt stigmatised by being asked to go to school

The average attendance figures for children in our care between September 2020 and May 2021 was 82.1%

8.4 Where children were not in school, the Virtual School worked closely with their school and carers to maintain academic progress. Over 90% of children in our care had their Personal Education Plan reviewed and updated during 2020-2021

8.5 While children in our care in RGB are more likely to remain in higher education than London and England, this has declined since 2019/20.

8.6 The Virtual School will be presenting their annual report to Children & Young People's Scrutiny at a future date which will include more detailed information on educational outcomes for the year.

9 **Involve you in decisions about your life**

9.1 All children in our care have reviews chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer. The timing of these reviews is statutory. During 2020-2021 the majority of these meetings were held virtually.

9.2 Reviews are where the Care Plan for every child is reviewed and where key decisions may be made for the future. All children aged 4+ should be invited to participate in their review.

Performance Indicator Description	Royal Greenwich	Royal Greenwich	Royal Greenwich
	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
Participation of looked after children in reviews.	341/368	395/414	398/435
	92.7%	95.4%	91.5%

This table shows that children in our care are supported to participate in their reviews and our performance in this area is being sustained.

9.3 Children in our care and care leavers are also supported in other ways to ensure that their voice is heard.

9.4 RBG commissions the following services to promote children in our care's involvement in decision making:

- Participation People – facilitate our Children in Our Care Council through a range of group activity. See appendix I for a report on activities during 2020-2021
- Advocacy for children in our care and care leavers – delivered by Barnardo's, to provide support in making complaints or participating in reviews

9.5 Complaints by children in our care are carefully monitored. During 2020-2021, there were eight Stage 1 complaints received from seven YP. Two of these were via Barnardo's, evidencing awareness and use of the advocacy service for YP in our care. The outcomes of these complaints were that one was resolved and discontinued, five were not upheld and two were fully or partially upheld. All complaints were resolved at informal stage, no complaints were escalated to stage 2. There were no themes identified in these complaints.

10 Support you to be active and stay healthy

	Royal Greenwich	Royal Greenwich	Royal Greenwich	London	England
	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2019/20	2019/20
Completed health assessments for children in our care for at least 1 year	334/336	339/347	359/360	-	-
	99.4%	97.7%	99.7%	92.0%	90.4%
Completed dental checks for children in our care for at least 1 year	203/336	321/347	324/360	-	-
	60.4%	92.5%	90.0%	83.7%	85.6%

Up to date immunisations for children in our care for at least 1 year	288/336	318/347	333/360	-	-
	85.7%	91.6%	92.5%	79.7%	87.8%

- 10.1 This table shows that in Royal Greenwich children in our care have accessed health assessments throughout lockdown. Overall, our performance is steady and better than London or England averages.
- 10.2 The picture in relation to both dental checks and routine immunisations is less positive; both these results have been heavily impacted by Covid 19.
- 10.3 The emotional well-being and mental health of children in our care and care leavers has been carefully monitored. In line with the wider child population, some children in our care have experienced feelings of anxiety and these have been particularly apparent where they have other diagnosed conditions such as autism. Children in our care have been well supported by their carers and social workers and where needed have accessed additional support through the dedicated CAMHS team for children in our care.
- 10.4 For children in adoptive placements good use has been made of the Adoption Support Fund, increased during the Covid period, to provide more bespoke therapeutic support where needed.
- 10.5 Some Care Leavers have had significant struggles with their emotional health and well-being during the year. They have reported higher levels of anxiety and a sense of hopelessness for their futures exacerbated by increased isolation and poorer employment opportunity. In addition to the support they receive from their Personal Advisors, the frequency of which was increased during lockdown, other support has been provided; from practical support such as ensuring they have laptops to enable virtual connectivity, through virtual group activities supported by Participation People, to extending a contract with a commissioned service that provides befriending volunteers to include Care Leavers. Where needed, Care Leavers have been well supported by their Personal Advisors to access mental health services.

11. **Ensure you feel prepared for adulthood**

- 11.1 From the start of the pandemic, Care Leavers have been a group that we have been particularly concerned about. They have been disproportionately affected by feelings of isolation, poor mental health and unemployment. In RBG we set the expectation that we should have more frequent contact with

our Care Leavers during this year and going forward. In some cases, this has been daily.

- 11.2 In 2019 we set up dedicated Care Leaver Teams to improve the consistency and quality of support to our Care Leavers. Care Leavers have an allocated Personal Advisor until the age of 21, or 25 if they have Special Educational Needs. All Personal Advisors try to encourage young people to stay in touch, however some will always choose not to.

Performance Indicator Description	Royal Greenwich	Royal Greenwich	Royal Greenwich	London	England
	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2019/20	2019/20
Care leavers 17-21 in touch	316/343 92.1%	306/339 90.3%	271/298 90.9%	- 88.2%	- 90.9%

This table shows that the percentage of Care Leavers that we are in touch with which is higher than the London and England averages and is improving.

- 11.3 When children in our care reach 18 they have different options. Most feel ready to move into supported accommodation until they are ready to take on their own tenancies. Others are not ready, and we try and encourage them to “stay put” in effect extending their placement with foster carers until they are ready.

Performance Indicator Description	Royal Greenwich	Royal Greenwich	Royal Greenwich	London	England
	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2019/20	2019/20
Care leavers staying put at 19-21	22/246 8.9%	14/234 6.0%	10/219 4.6%	- 7.7%	- 8.0%

This table shows that more Care Leavers are taking up this option, which is positive. However, a consequence of this improvement is that it reduces the number of foster placements that are available.

- 11.4 We want all our Care Leavers to be accessing Education, Employment and Training (EET) and this forms a key part of a Personal Advisors work with our young people.

Performance Indicator Description	Royal Greenwich	Royal Greenwich	Royal Greenwich	London	England
	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2019/20	2019/20
Young people aged 17-21 who were looked after aged 16 who were in employment, education or training	187/343	193/339	177/298	-	-
	54.5%	56.9%	59.4%	58.6%	55.6%
Care leavers aged 19-21 who were in higher education	22/246	33/234	24/219	-	-
	8.9%	14.1%	11.0%	8.0%	6.1%

This table shows that our EET figures are declining bringing us below the London and England average. While we have been working with a Department for Education innovation project, I-Aspire, whose sole focus is to move Care Leavers into EET this has not brought about improvement. The table also shows that while our performance in regard to higher education is positive compared to London and England, it is a significant drop for RBG. Both of these performance figures are directly attributable to Covid 19; there are fewer employment opportunities for our Care Leavers and some vocational courses, which they have previously accessed, have not been available.

- 11.5 The proportion of care leavers living in suitable accommodation has increased since 2019/20, and this remains more positive than the most recent London and England outturns. Cumulatively, over 17% of our care leavers remain living with their carers after they reach 18 in staying put arrangements.

Performance Indicator Description	Royal Greenwich	Royal Greenwich	Royal Greenwich	London	England
	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2019/20	2019/20
Care leavers aged 17-21 living in suitable accommodation	305/343	290/336	255/297	-	-
	88.9%	86.3%	85.9%	85.1%	86.5%

12. Corporate Parenting Priorities for 2021-2022

- 12.1 We need to support our Care Leavers to access Education, Employment and Training. This will help not only with future opportunities but help reduce the impact of isolation and poor emotional health. We plan to further develop a pre-apprenticeship work placement specifically targeting looked after children and care leavers to provide support and work experience to help them make successful applications to apprenticeship opportunities.

- 12.2 Using the learning from the temporary Children’s Home and in response to the challenge in finding appropriate high-quality placements for adolescents and as part of our longer-term drive to keep children close to home, we are progressing plans to open an adolescent residential assessment unit. Capital funding has been agreed, planning permission secured, and a partnership project board is underway to progress plans.
- 12.3 Working with Newton Europe, we are progressing plans to increase the number of RBG foster carers and to ensure that these carers are able to look after some of our more difficult to place children and young people. This will again keep children closer to home, ensure high quality placements and increase placement stability. Early results are showing a significant increase in the numbers of initial enquiries that convert to applications and work has been completed to streamline the assessment process without compromising quality.
- 12.4 Continue to raise awareness of Corporate Parenting across the Council including elected members. This will include:
- Implementing a programme of events devised by our Children in Care Council
 - Celebration events such as the Children in our Care awards ceremony
 - Events planned around Corporate Parenting Week
 - Inclusion of Corporate Parenting considerations as part of the committee report template
 - Encouraging all officers and members to support the work to recruit more foster carers to RBG

13. Cross-Cutting Issues and Implications

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Legal including Human Rights Act	The purpose of this report is for the Scrutiny Panel to note and comment on the work of Children’s Services in relation to children in our care during 2020-2021 and on the areas identified for further action in 2021-2022. It is for noting and discussion only and therefore	Davidaire Horsford, Assistant Head of Legal Services 17 June 2021

	there are no legal implications arising from the report.	
Finance	This report outlines the work of Children’s Services in relation to children in our care during 2020-2021 and details areas identified for further action in 2021-2022. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.	Michael Bate Assistant Director of Corporate Finance 17 June 2021
Equalities	The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no apparent equality impact on end users.	Henrietta Quartano Senior Assistant Director Children’s Social Care 11.06.2021

13. **Report Appendices**

13.1 The following documents are to be published with and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Youth Voice Report for Corporate Parenting Report

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