



Tower Hamlets Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2024/25

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Foreword

I'd like to welcome everyone to this year's annual report, which highlights a period of significant commitment, progress and achievement for the Corporate Parenting Board. This report sets out the functions and responsibilities of the board, highlights of the work undertaken throughout the year and future plans.

The term 'corporate parenting' is an important part of how certain responsibilities are made clear. However, when thinking of the children we care for, our approach is to focus more on the parenting and less on the corporate. Every member of the board, as well as colleagues across the council and partner agencies, strive to offer the very best for our children and young people, always being there when needed and willing to do whatever is necessary to ensure they have every opportunity develop, realise their aspirations and thrive.

One of the most notable milestones this year was our Ofsted Children's Services inspection result of 'outstanding' for overall effectiveness and the experiences and progress of care leavers. The inspection report noted that the knowledge and understanding of corporate parenting 'is reflected throughout the culture of the council' as well as drawing attention to the contributions from our young people.

We are proud of this wonderful achievement, which reflects the dedication of so many, but we recognise that our journey and commitment to improve outcomes for children, continues with as much drive and determination as before.

Another highlight in the year was the refurbishment of the venue where our Through Care Services are based and young people regularly visit. The site has been thoughtfully enhanced with welcoming new facilities that are already making a meaningful difference to those who use them.

The progress we've made is thanks to collaborative efforts, with the Corporate Parenting Board playing a key role by bringing together leadership, resources, and innovation. We hope this report provides you with insight about how we work together through the board and inspires everyone to join us in expanding opportunities for care experienced children and young people.



**Steve Reddy, Corporate
Director Children's Services**



**Councillor Maium Talukdar,
Deputy Mayor and Chair of the
Corporate Parenting Board**

Introduction from the Chair of the Children Living in Care Council

As the Chair of the Senior Children Living in Care Council, I'm proud to introduce this year's annual report as a representative for care experienced children and young people in Tower Hamlets. Our three CLICC Groups (for different age groups) provide places where we can feel truly listened to, respected, and valued.

We get involved in activities and events that allow us to express ourselves, build confidence, and learn new things. Whether taking part in workshops, taking trips, engaging with decision-makers through forums like the Corporate Parenting Board, or spending time together, every opportunity helps us to grow.

These experiences are chances to discover our strengths, try something new, and see that our voices matter.

We're proud of everything we've achieved over the past year, and we're even more excited about building on that progress. With the new facilities and surroundings at Kitcat Terrace (the hub for a lot of our activities) we know we can do so much more.

Thank you to everyone who supports us and helps to make a positive difference, please join us in making the year to come an even greater success story for all children and young people with care experience.



**Omar Alibrahim, Chair,
Senior Children Living in
Care Council**

The children we care for and care experienced young people

Children Looked After

284 children were looked after by the local authority (at end of Mar 2025 – this was 276 for Mar 2024)

Under 5	53
5 to 9	40
10 to 15	92
16 to 17	99

- There were 37 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) (at end of Mar 2025 - this was 30 at Mar 2024)
- 'Children Looked After' long term placement stability 74% (end of Mar 2025 - this was 69% at Mar 2024)
- Average no. of placement moves 1.4 (end of Mar 2025 - this was 1.4 at Mar 2024)

Accommodation

96% of allocated care experienced young people (17-21) were in suitable accommodation (at end of Mar 2025 - this was 93% at Mar 2024)

Care experienced young people

At 31st March 2025 the Through Care Service was working with a cohort of 448 young people, between the ages of 14 – 25 (this was 461 at Mar 2024)

Health

90% of 'Children Looked After' had an annual health check within 12 months (end Mar 2023 – this was 93% at Mar 2024)

94% of 'Children Looked After' had an annual dental check within 12 months (end Mar 2025 - this was 93% at Mar 2024)

Education, training and employment

62 % of pupils making expected progress (spring term 2024/25 - this was 58% for spring term 2023/24)

98 % of pupils had a personal education plan meeting during the term (spring term 2024/25 - this was 99% for spring term 2023/24)

98 % of allocated care experienced young people (17 – 25) had a pathway plan (end of Mar 2025 - this was 98% at Mar 2024)

72 % of allocated care experienced young people (17 - 25) were in employment, education or training (end of Mar 2025 - this was 73% at Mar 2024)

Governance

The national strategic context

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2024

The '[Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#)' aims to change the law to better protect children and raise standards in education. The bill consists of two parts - Part One: Children's Social Care and Part Two: Schools.

Part One of the Bill 'Children's Social Care' includes measures around kinship care and family networks, child protection, support for care leavers, accommodation for looked after children and children's social care workers. The Bill is making its way through parliament and will be subject to further debate.

The policy statement '[Keeping children safe, helping families thrive](#)', published in November 2024, outlines the bill's measures in further detail, setting out the government's commitment to whole system reform of the children's social care system.

The Bill follows previous policy publications and pilots in relation to children's social care reform, including:

- '[Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#)' (May 2022)
- Launch of '[Stable Homes, Built on Love](#)' Strategy' - focused on providing nurturing, stable and loving homes for children in care and care experienced young people (published Feb 2023)
- Changes to the '[Working Together](#)' guidance (Dec 2023)
- Policy statement '[Keeping children safe helping families thrive](#)' (Nov 2024)

Legal Context

The '[Children and Social Work Act 2017](#)' (Section 1) sets out seven corporate parenting principles which local authorities must have regard to for children looked after or care experienced young people. In February 2018 the statutory guidance for local authorities '[Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care experienced young people](#)' was published.

The guidance puts forward the critical question for local authorities as the corporate parent should be '*would this be good enough for my child*'? They also highlight that children in our care have the same needs – to be loved, cared for and feel safe - as other children.

The corporate parenting principles

In order to thrive, children and young people have certain key needs that good parents generally meet. The corporate parenting principles set out seven principles that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to children in our care and young people, as follows:

1. To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people
2. To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
3. To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
4. 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
5. To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
6. For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
7. To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.



Tower Hamlets Better Together Practice Framework

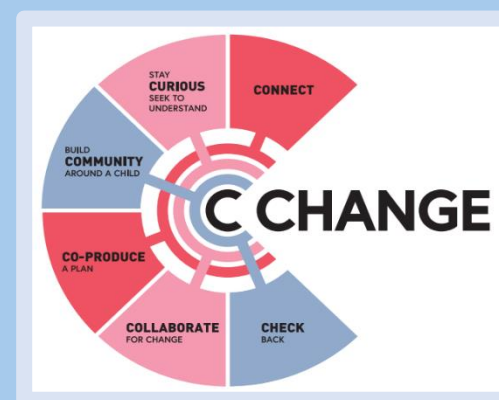
The Tower Hamlets Supporting Families Division has an agreed approach that puts relationships at the heart of the way we work, we call this 'Better Together'.

This approach drives how every member of staff engages with children and families – from social workers, personal advisors, Independent Reviewing Officers, supervising social workers, those who might supervise family time, and anyone else who works in the division.

The 'Better Together' framework recognises how important good, strong relationships are and encourages us to build them with all those we are working with, as well as work to repair them if the need arises. Our vision is 'We believe that the best place for children is to be raised within their own families, immediate or wider, wherever it is safe and appropriate to do so'.

In Tower Hamlets we are committed to building relationships and strengthening families by working with people in a compassionate and understanding way. We are ambitious for Tower Hamlets children and families and endeavour for every child and young person to be healthy, safe and successful.

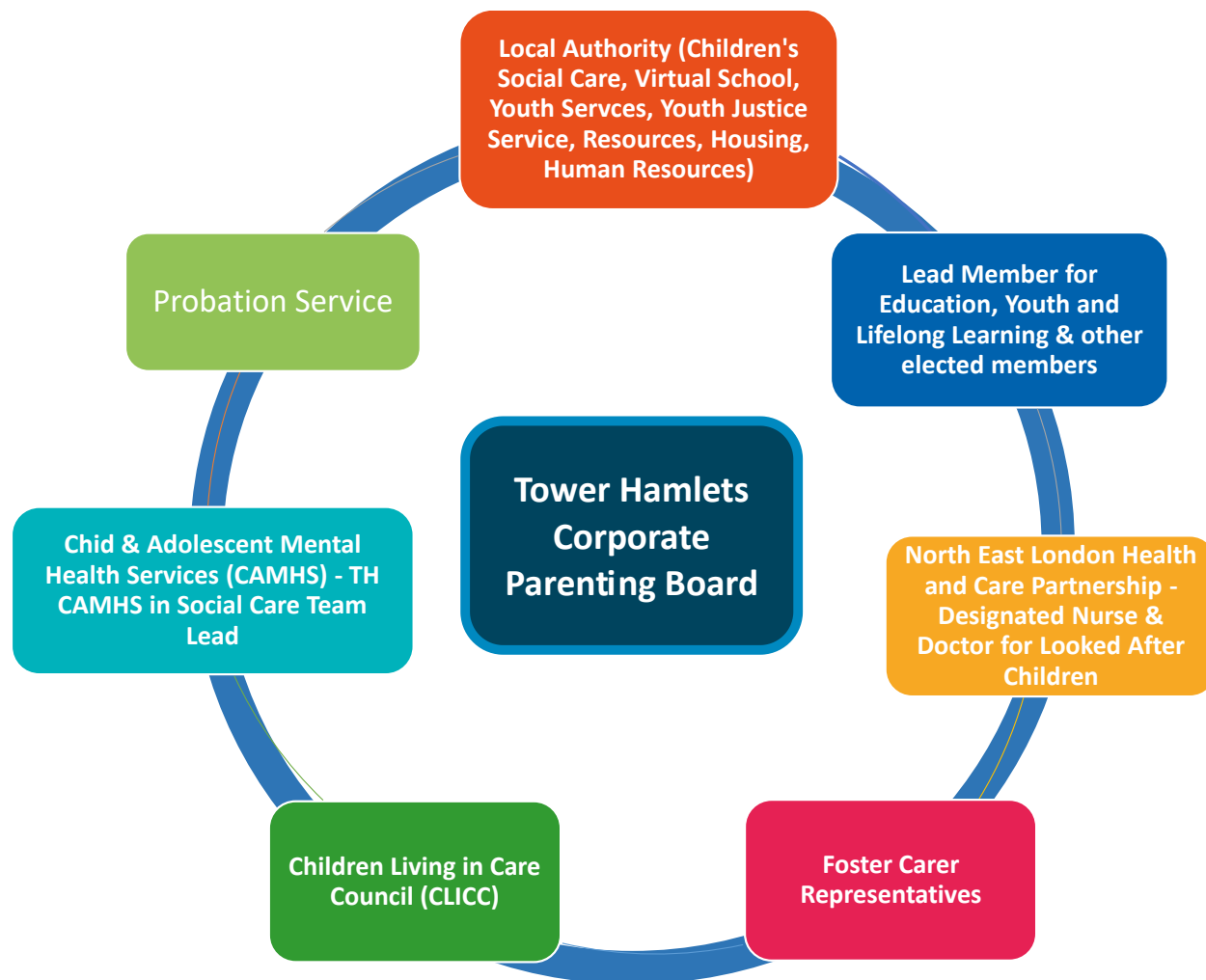
The framework includes the following behaviours and sets out 6 'Cs' of how we will work with children, families and each other. The Better Together Framework is very much aligned with the Corporate Parenting Strategy and is woven through this report.



Behaviours we've committed to:

- Be open and honest – do what we say we'll do and explain what happens next.
- Listen to understand – be curious, not judgemental.
- Value families' experience – work with families, don't 'do to' or 'do for' them.
- Work to prevent harm and repair damage – to people and relationships.
- Empower people – giving high support and having high expectations.

Membership of the Corporate Parenting Board



Raising the game on corporate parenting

'Outstanding' Tower Hamlets' Children's Services

In the Ofsted report published in January 2025, Tower Hamlets' Children's Services were rated as 'Outstanding' - the highest rating attainable. The inspection credited a journey of "relentless drive" and continuous improvement in achieving the result.

The report found that children receive timely and effective help, and that staff "are ambitious for children, encouraging them to reach their full potential. As a result, children receive excellent support." Outstanding support for children leaving care was noted, with care-experienced children and young people benefitting from "high quality support and a wealth of services" tailored to their needs.

The strength of corporate parenting arrangements was highlighted with Ofsted noting that 'the corporate parenting board operates collaboratively with both partners and young people represented. It is an effective decision-making forum which influences change'.

The importance we place on the involvement of our care experience children and young people was reflected in the finding that 'children have a seat at the leadership table, are fully involved and have a strong voice in service developments through their engagement.'

Throughout this report you will see further extracts from the Ofsted report, demonstrating the impact services have for our care experienced children and young people.

Tower Hamlets Corporate Parenting Board (CPB)

The Corporate Parenting Board, chaired by the Lead Member (Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning) provides strategic oversight to review and drive forward our work with children in our care and care experienced young people, ensuring that our corporate parenting responsibilities are fulfilled. The board meets quarterly and includes representatives from internal council departments and wider multi-agency partners ensuring cross-collaboration and shared decision making.

Alongside the Children Living in Care Council (CLICC), the board provides a forum where children and young people in the care of the council engage directly with senior leaders and decision makers to share their views and raise and address issues.

The board has been strengthened during the last year with new health representatives joining, increased engagement across council Directorates to take a more joined-up approach to issues such as identifying employment related opportunities for our young people and addressing housing issues that can affect care leavers and foster carers.

The diagram on page 9 sets out the membership of the board and a full list is provided at Appendix A. Appendix B provides an overview of the topics covered in CPB meetings during 2024/25

Corporate Parenting Strategy 2023 to 2028

We are now in our second year of delivering against the strategy, with the Corporate Parenting Operational Group in place to drive implementation and monitor progress against a detailed action plan. The strategy action plan is regularly reviewed and refreshed to ensure it is aligned to other programmes, including the Better Together Improvement Plan and how the council is responding to Children's Social Care Reforms.

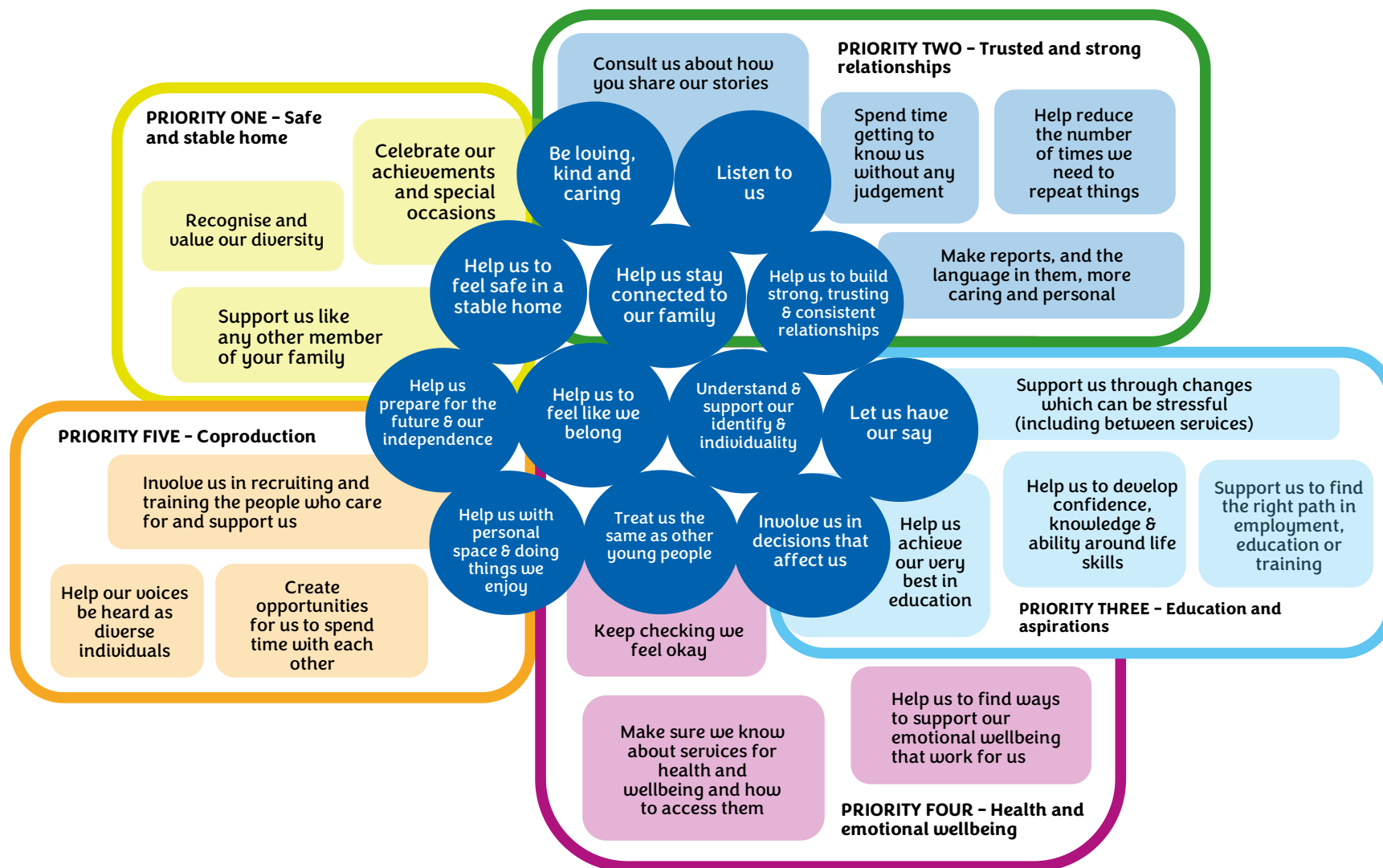
The 'Key messages from care experienced children & young people' (shown on page 12) remain the foundation of our work. The messages came from discussions focused on what mattered most to our young people and what they considered to be fundamental in making life good.

One of the key measures from the strategy was to make 'care experience' a protected characteristic. This has helped to strengthen and expand, across the organisation, the way in which we recognise and respond to the challenges those with care experience can face. As highlighted in the Ofsted report from January 2025, this 'positively influences decisions for young people'.

This annual report is structured around the priorities within the strategy and highlights achievements from the last year, as well as plans for the future.



Key messages from care experienced children & young people (from Tower Hamlets Corporate Parenting Strategy 2023-2028)



The Role of Foster Carers

Tower Hamlets Foster Carers Association (FCA)

Tower Hamlets Foster Carers Association (FCA) has operated as an independent body for 20 years. The FCA is an essential partner in developing and delivering services and support to children in our care and carers. They provide feedback and help to identify ways to improve and strengthen the offer in the borough. Offering advice, guidance and support to foster carers is also central to their role.

Monthly meetings are held by the TH FCA Committee where they act as a voice for the carer community in relation to all issues affecting their members. These meetings also provide a forum to advocate and negotiate with the council Fostering Service.

The Foster Carers Support Group holds regular morning and evening meetings with co-facilitation from the TH FCA and Fostering Development Team. During these sessions any issues can be raised and explored in detail before seeking a response or resolution. The expertise and experience of the TH FCA allows them to support and promote the recruitment of new foster carers through their work as fostering ambassadors.

In May 2024 the FCA Annual General Meeting and Awards event took place, providing an opportunity to showcase all that the Foster Carers have achieved and the positive impact they have on the lives of our children.

As ever, the FCA has organised trips, events and activities throughout the last year to bring together foster carers and children so that they get more chances to have fun together, build and strengthen relationships and support each other. The programme for 2024/25 included:

- Visit to Colchester Zoo in May 2024
- Lazer Quest Event in May 2024
- Summer outing to Southend seaside in August 2024
- Tower Hamlets FCA Summer Party in August 2024
- Trip to the Pantomime in December 2024

Mockingbird Programme

Mockingbird is a pioneering programme delivered by The Fostering Network in partnership with 62 fostering services across the UK. The programme nurtures the relationships between children, young people and foster families supporting them to build a resilient and caring community of six to ten satellite families called a constellation.

Relationships are central to Mockingbird. The hub 'Home Carer' builds strong relationships between everyone within the constellation, empowering families to support each other and overcome any issues they might experience. This in turn increases the protective factors around the children. Tower Hamlets is working on the implementation of a fourth Mockingbird constellation. To ensure that all children and young people can access a stable and loving home, this fourth hub is likely to support kinship carers, as well as children in residential settings.

Priority One: Safe and stable homes - ensuring children feel loved and well cared for in a home that is right for them

Key achievements in 2024/25

Recruitment of Foster Carers

Recruitment of foster carers is challenging across the UK, and this is reflected regionally and locally. In Tower Hamlets we continue to explore innovative ways to attract interest in foster caring and support people to explore whether they can provide a child with a loving and stable environment for them to grow and develop.

Local Community Fostering (LCF)

The LCF is a collaboration between several London boroughs, offering a channel for recruitment of prospective foster carers ready to progress through the traditional routes into fostering. A 'Foster Walk' took place in 2024 as a launch event for the recruitment hub with some of our Foster Carers and care experienced children taking part.

The LCF refers enquiries to local Fostering Teams and these can lead to an initial visit and a full assessment where appropriate. Analysis of all activity shows that being a part of the LCF improved the conversion rate from initial enquiries to visits, and visits to assessments, for Tower Hamlets and other participating boroughs.

It is anticipated that there will be changes to the LCF in 2025 as two boroughs have chosen not to renew their option to be a part of the hub from May 2025 onwards.

Access to Fostering Scheme

The first 'Access to Fostering' pilot group was delivered in December 2024. The pilot resulted in accreditation for the course provided and opportunities for greater collaborative working between Fostering and Parental Engagement Teams.

Ahead of commencement for the second group, a full review of outcomes was conducted to ensure we had identified any improvements that needed to be made and strengthened the process to increase the number of participants that completed the course and progressed to the assessment stage.



Priority One: Safe and stable homes

Starting in January 2025, the latest 'Access to Fostering' course used multiple channels and activities to promote the sessions, undertook a two-stage screening and selection process and included a comprehensive package of support throughout.

Training and development for Foster Carers

Our focus on continuous professional development for foster carers has produced good outcomes with strong uptake for courses. The wide range of training opportunities, running frequently though the year, supports our commitment to be a trauma-informed fostering service. An annual training brochure provides opportunities for flexible learning to ensure we are offering all carers equality of access to high quality learning and development opportunities. We have increased this provision for those who work or have other commitments during the day. During 2024, 74 trainer-led courses were delivered with a total number of 806 spaces used by foster carers and 167 active learner accounts were active on 'The Training Hub' our online provider.

**Maintaining and improving stability**

Sometimes a child in our care will experience a move due to a planned change, such as through adoption, reunification, or extended family care. However, there is a great deal of work that is carried out to minimise any disruption to the home a child lives in. The term 'placement stability' can be used to describe activities that focus on helping our children to experience long term, stable living arrangements as much as possible.

Part of how we do this is through therapeutic work with foster carer households when additional assistance is needed to support stability. This can be through individual therapeutic engagement, access to training or sometimes complementary consultations to the school a child is attending, if it is integral to securing and maintaining stability in the home.

Many (children) have lived with their carers for a long time and consequently feel safe and secure with their permanent carers.....children and families benefit from being supported by a committed, stable, skilled and permanent workforce.....Ofsted finding (Nov 2024 Inspection)

Priority One: Safe and stable homes

Foundation for Attachment Therapeutic Programme

The Foundations for Attachment Programme is delivered by the Therapeutic Fostering and Care Team (TFACT). The team is led by clinical psychologists and works closely with Tower Hamlets Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) as it aims to provide foster carers with therapeutic support.

The programme consists of six-sessions to help foster carers to nurture attachments with their child. It is designed specifically for those caring for children whose capacity to emotionally connect has been affected by attachment difficulties, trauma, and loss or separation. The course can help with improving trust in relationships and developing a greater understanding of the impact of trauma for children. A total of 104 foster carers have now undertaken this course.

Work with us with 'mutual respect' and 'establish trust'

Activity highlights for 2025/26

- Review outcomes from the Local Community Fostering (LCF) initiative and explore options for how we can work in partnership with other local authorities to maximise the benefits of collaboration to recruit foster carers.
- Establish an annual Celebration Day for Foster Carers and professionals building on successful celebration events held in 2024/25. For 2025, we are exploring the impact of fostering for birth children and want to celebrate them and the rich feedback they provide in their family annual household review.
- On 14 May 2025, LBTH and the LCF will join in the annual Foster Walk. This is aimed at highlighting and showcasing fostering and to garner publicity, leading to potential uptake. Staff and foster carers will be sharing information and providing leaflets to all.
- Further embed therapeutic practice through discussion and meetings with Supervising Social Workers and the Senior Leadership Team to explore delivery of therapeutic training for children's social workers.
- Undertake a 'Buddy Support Scheme' pilot for experienced foster carers to provide a peer support service to those who are newly approved. Aims include improving understanding of the role and encouraging taking up training and support group opportunities.
- Analysis of a survey focused on what Independent Fostering Agencies offer their foster carers

Priority Two: trusted and strong relationships - surrounding children with caring people who work hard to listen, understand and respond to their needs.

Key achievements in 2024/25

Lifelong Links (LL)

The charity 'Family Rights Group' developed the LL approach and is now celebrating 50 years of working with others to help ensure children build lasting and loving relationships.

The LL Team in Tower Hamlets helps children in care connect with people who care about them, including relatives, former teachers, or carers. The service is for children who are living away from their family, and adults with care experience, who want to connect and reconnect with important people in their lives.

'Exciting and life changing – go for it' (reflections from being involved in lifelong links)

As a LL Manager described in a recent newsletter about the service *'Our talented and diverse independent Lifelong Links Co-ordinators are able work directly with children where they are the lead, building trusting relationships and being able to have open and honest discussions. Children tell us that they value the independence of the co-ordinators, the time spent together with the focus being entirely on them.'*

During 2024/25 LL has consistently promoted the service with colleagues and partner organisations. Newsletters, a video and podcast have all been produced to help highlight the positive difference LL can make through increased connections to the past, present and future.

Young people are encouraged and supported to maintain relationships with people who are important to them. When young people are not in contact with their birth families, attempts are made to locate family members to help young people understand their journeys....Ofsted Inspection Nov 2024

Family Group Experts

The Family Group Experts are parents or grandparents who have had social work and early help involvement in their family life. They share their lived experiences to help make services more effective and to improve the lives of children. They are involved in discussions, events and training activities and have helped to provide input and ideas on many areas including advising on the 'Tower Hamlets Better Together Restorative Practise Framework', providing input to the 'Reducing Parental Conflict Guidance' for families, and consulting on the review of 'Language Guidance'.

Priority Two: trusted and strong relationships

In 2024 the FG Experts were part of the interview panel to recruit new social workers (in partnership with the Learning Academy) and were involved in the selection of shortlisted candidates. Two FG Experts also represented Tower Hamlets at the global parental panel 'International Kempe Conference' as well as running a workshop at the event.

**Kinship Care Pilot**

Tower Hamlets is part of the National Kinship Care pilot, from the organisation 'Foundations' (the 'What works' Centre for Children). This focuses on using the new Kinship Care Practice Guide to strengthen support for kinship carers and help more children stay safely within their family networks.

Kinship care refers to when family or friends are carers for a child. This might be a grandparent, aunt, uncle, brother, sister or family friend looking after a child who cannot be cared for by their birth parents. This work is helping us shape a more effective local offer, including tailored parenting programmes, practical support to navigate services, and access to therapeutic help such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

Developing our practice around language

In early 2024 we introduced guidance on language to improve how professionals, both within the council and partner organisations, communicate with children and families. During the last year a working group has continued the programme, further developing the guidance and tools with the aim of empowering people to write and talk more thoughtfully.

During 2024 ongoing engagement with colleagues has helped to promote use of the guidance and gain feedback as it is used in practice, informing improvements and identifying and addressing any issues.

Priority Two: trusted and strong relationship**Working with Foster Carers around reviews**

The Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Service will be working with Foster Carers on how they can contribute to children's reviews in a more creative way that reflects the joys, strengths, and challenges within the foster home. Conversations have taken place with foster carers and managers in the Fostering Service around enhancing this with updates to the consultation form so that it supports the more reflective approach being suggested.

Instead of the standard consultation form, Foster Carers will be encouraged to free write in a way they feel comfortable. They will be supported to write something together with the child that can be used for their review to represent a snapshot of their time together and what family life looks like. This can also become part of the record foster carers keep of the child's time in their care. This could be a letter, stories, pictures, etc, about what they have enjoyed or achieved in the preceding months, what might have been difficult, anything that both might want to work towards improving or do before the next review.

This approach is in line with the reframing of the use of language across Supporting Families Division. Foster Carers will therefore be supported to start writing their contributions to reviews 'to and with' the child wherever possible in the hope that the child will be more invested in the conversations that arise from them that take place in their meeting.

Activity highlights for 2025/26

- Lifelong Links (LL) will continue to deliver on its vision, mission and objectives with strategies and tactics for how it can empower families and build lasting connections for children in our care. The overarching vision is to:
 - Make Lifelong Links (LL) available to all children in care.
 - Ensure children have information about LL.
 - Become an accredited Lifelong Links service by June 2025.
 - Embed 100% of LL plans in Children's Care Plans.
- Areas of focus for the Language Working Group in 2025 will include:
 - Reviewing and updating the 'Practice Guidance around Language Document' with partners so that it reflects latest learning and responds to feedback and lessons learnt since it was first published.
 - Delivering training and support around language guidance to council and partner organisation colleagues.
 - Further consultation with children and families, including via Family Group Experts, Parents Forums and the Children Living in Care Council.

Priority Two: trusted and strong relationships

- Further promotion and roll-out of the new approach for Foster Carers contribution to reviews will include feedback from foster carers and other consultation throughout 2025 to enable them to feel fully confident with this new approach.
 - In recognition that this will be a new way of working for Foster Carers, the IRO Service has developed a course entitled 'The Art of Writing to Children' which will have a morning and evening session to reach as many carers as possible. It has been included in the new training brochure with the aim of helping carers develop and practice their skills and grow in confidence in this new way of contributing to children's reviews.



Priority Three: education and aspirations: helping children find out what inspires them, achieve the best possible outcomes and create the future they want.

Key achievements in 2024/25

Tower Hamlets Virtual School

A Virtual School is a specialised educational service that supports the educational needs of Children in Our Care (CIOC). The school does not have physical classrooms but operates as coordinating body working with educational institutions to ensure our children get the very best education offer possible. Tower Hamlets Virtual School is staffed by experienced teachers who liaise with over 300 schools and educational establishments to provide support for our children in care and other at-risk groups.

(my support worker) is really reliable, someone I can go to with everything

A Research-Based Approach

The Virtual School (VS) utilises the seminal research of the REES institute to guide its work. It uses key indicators to focus on factors that are proven to improve outcomes for our children. Researchers from REES are supporting Virtual Schools and the DfE with the work guiding the new expanded duties for all Children with a Social Worker (CWSW).

Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

The Virtual School creates a network around every child entering care and creates a Personal Education Plan (PEP) within 10 days and updates it each term. 98% of pupils had a fully completed PEP each term in the last school year.

All our children have academic and personal targets which are set using information about prior attainment and then tracked through the PEP. All PEPs undergo a moderation process to ensure their quality, with input from professionals from other teams.

For example, Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) helped to improve the PEP layout with the addition of a 'key data page' to provide easier to access information during reviews and other activities. The impact of our continuous Designated Teacher training for schools and social workers is demonstrated through the increased level of high-quality PEPs (rated as 'Green') for children who have been in our care for over one year.

The dedicated and highly effective virtual school acts as a persistent, experienced and strong advocate for children. Consequently, children make progress and improvements in their academic performance....the council has several initiatives that support young people to pursue their hopes and aspirations.....Ofsted Inspection Nov 2024

Priority Three: education and aspirations**Supporting attendance**

Dual registration of every child is in place to track daily attendance and other information related to ensuring we are able to respond to events that could affect attendance at school. The overall attendance rate for children in our care was 91% for the academic year 2023/24, which exceeds the national figure by 3.2%.

Enrichment Opportunities

The service offers extra-curricular activities with partners including the English National Ballet, BT, Half Moon Theatre and the West Ham Foundation.

The achievements of our children in care are celebrated at the Virtual School Annual Awards held at BT's headquarters for the last 3 years. This inspiring event was hosted by the Headteacher David Cregan, alongside keynote speakers. In 2024 speakers included Ashley John-Baptiste and Action Jackson.

The event continues to showcase the exceptional progress of our young people and the impact of the service on their lives. Alumni, carers, students, council leaders, and care staff attend the awards, reinforcing that there are no limits to what our children can achieve and that the Virtual School is a supportive and vibrant community that they should be proud to be part of.

Guidance on preparing for independence

We have developed 'Preparation for Independence and Transition to Adulthood' guidance to help enhance the ways in which we support our young people as they move towards adulthood and all the changed this brings with it. The guidance sits alongside, and compliments, the transitions protocol that is in place between children's and adult's services.

Transition planning and preparation, as well as meetings to review these plans, has been strengthened to ensure that consideration is given to any unmet need or delay that might have a negative impact and additional support can be offered where needed. These arrangements continue after a young person's 18th birthday, and for as long as it is appropriate. The guidance provides detail on the purpose of these processes, how they are to be delivered and a step-by-step guide to how they work in practice.



Priority Three: education and aspirations

Education, Employment and Training support

Education, Employment and Training Advisors (based in the Through Care Team) have helped young people to secure wonderful outcomes throughout the year with two care leavers securing roles with the Civil Service (one on the Graduate Scheme and another on the Care Leaver's Internship Programme). Two further care leavers secured ring-fenced roles with the National Health Service.

Activity highlights for 2025/26

- Developing and delivering a dedicated pre-apprenticeship, internship and apprenticeship programme for in-council opportunities for care experienced young people in 2025 to 26. The programme has taken learning from a training and apprenticeship offer in 2024 which saw some young people taking up roles within the council. Ongoing pastoral care will be in place to support young people at every stage and help them to get the most from their experiences.
- Full Potential Programme – this initiative will focus on education, employment and training related support and interventions for care leavers. This flexible offer will concentrate on what support individuals need to help them in working towards achieving their aspirations.
- Enhancing the Pupil Education Plan (PEP) through development of training to embed the 'Better Together'

language of caring across all services, ensuring schools provide supportive and nurturing PEPs for our children.

- Review the online Electronic PEP and align them to the primary, SEND, and post-16 PEP templates to the Secondary PEP structure for easier use by schools, navigation and simplified data comparison over a child's learning journey.
- VS staff education and development to include staff leadership skills and Post-16 Designated Teacher training to enhance support, progress, and retention of students at post-16 colleges through training and understanding of issues like trauma.
- Use e-learning technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI) strategies to support more effective practice as a VS and the use of emerging technology to aid students in their independent study and effective revision for public exams, boosting outcomes.
- Deliver stand-alone English and Maths tuition to support students, who are experiencing challenges and barriers, so that they can gain these essential qualifications. This will be targeted support including care experienced young people and others whose progress needs additional engagement.
- Continue to develop post-16 and vocational offer for care experienced students. The Virtual School aims to become a Virtual College, supporting our children up to age 25 and into the workplace. The offer is gradually being expanded to include work skills, work experience, and vocational enrichment.

Priority Four: health and emotional wellbeing - supporting children, through warm and nurturing care, to stay physically and emotionally healthy

Key achievements in 2024/25

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in Social Care

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in Social Care (CiSC) Team aims to be accessible and responsive to both the mental health needs of children with a social care plan, their parents, carers and the wider workforce in direct relationship with our children. In 2024, 266 new referrals were made to the team, via various routes, leading to wide range of outcomes, further actions and assessment and intervention as needed.

Emotional Wellbeing Screenings

An 'Emotional Wellbeing Screening' is offered for all children and young people newly coming into the care system and a 'screening consultation' can take place ahead of this with the allocated Social Worker to consider the best approach. In 2024, 124 screenings were offered to children in our care.

Enhanced Initial Health Assessments (IHA) for Children Seeking Asylum

As part of a pilot project CAMHS in Social Care clinicians have joined Barts Health colleagues to offer an enhanced IHA for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) coming into local authority care.

Both a Paediatrician from Mile End Hospital and a Clinical Psychologist from CiSC aim to identify physical and mental health needs for young people who have often been through traumatic events in the lead up to them seeking care and asylum in the borough.

"Mental health is the biggest issue. It can become quite lonely, or you see happy families outside and you're just like 'oh but that's not me.'"

Collaboration with the Learning Academy for the Children's Services Workforce

The CiSC Team have been working with the Learning Academy on their offer to the workforce. This has included offering consultation on 'Trauma and its impacts' as part of the regular learning sessions for social workers, contributions to 'Learning Circles' focused on impacts of secondary trauma and support for using 'Words & Pictures' storyboards as a tool for communicating with children about things adults find hard to talk about.

Priority Four: health and emotional wellbeing

Quality Assuring Initial Health Assessments

An audit of IHA's undertaken in Tower Hamlets was carried out by North East London (NEL) Integrated Commissioning Board (ICB) in September 2024 with the aim of:

- ensuring high quality assessments for looked after children when they come into to care through their Initial Health Assessment, and
- Raising awareness about the health needs of this group of children and making sure we are following the guidance to promote their health.

The audit monitored compliance with statutory guidance on promoting the health and wellbeing of looked after children and examined various aspects of the process and intended outcomes.

Ten assessments were audited in detail and following this a report on the findings with a set of recommendations was produced and discussed at Corporate Parenting Board. The recommendations are now being incorporated into operational activity and improvement plans for both health and council colleagues.

Social Worker Support at Health Assessments

Work has been underway during the last year to promote the benefits of social workers attending initial health assessments and review health assessments where it is felt children would benefit from the additional support. There has been regular discussion at

Director's briefing sessions and attendance is being recorded within health records. An audit of this activity will be undertaken to ensure desired outcomes are being achieved.

Welcoming new members of staff

The health-related support to care experienced children and young people in Tower Hamlets was strengthened in 2024 with two new members of staff joining the North East London Health and Care Partnership as Interim Designated Doctor for Looked After Children and Designated Nurse for Looked After Children.

Careers for young people in health services

During a CPB meeting focused on Health and Wellbeing, our young people shared feedback on challenges in finding work experience for those considering a career in health services. This was shared by our Designated Nurse for Looked After Children with key leads in health and together with social care leads and led to development of a poster with all the medical/allied health work experience, volunteering and support available. The poster, with links to further details, was distributed widely, including on to the 'KNOW NOW' App for care experience young people.

When it is identified that a child is struggling with their emotional well-being, swift provision of effective therapeutic support is put in place to help them. This service provides sensitive and insightful individual support to children and their carers.....Ofsted Inspection Nov 2024

Priority Four: health and emotional wellbeing**Activity highlights for 2025/26**

- The strategic priorities and agreed actions for health and social care services and children's social care are set out within the Tower Hamlets 'Corporate Parenting Strategy' and North East London Integrated Commissioning Board 'Looked After Children and Care Leavers Quality Improvement Strategy'.
 - Work will continue in 2025 to 26 to deliver against these strategies which set out aims and objectives to improve the health and wellbeing of our care experienced children and young people.
- The introduction of a new mental health and emotional wellbeing offer at Kitcat Terrace. This will include regular slots by the provider to attend Kitcat Terrace and connect with young people on a 'non-clinical' basis. The approach will be aimed at ensuring support is available in a way that encourages engagement, normalises discussion about mental health and emotional wellbeing and helps to dispel stigma around these issues.
 - Feedback on the response to the service and insight on needs will be gathered throughout 2025/26 so that findings can help inform other work, services and future plans.
- The refurbishment of Kitcat Terrace included creating a dedicated space where health professionals could operate and deliver Health Assessments (HAs) and Review Health

Assessments (RHAs). This will mean young people can engage with health professionals in a more welcoming, less clinical, setting to support better identification of need and more positive outcomes.

- The initial refurbishment has installed some equipment and now work is underway to finalise set up with the necessary furniture and IT equipment.
- Health passports – following work to ensure all passports due had been issued, and systems were robust for ongoing delivery, the focus for 2025 to 26 is monitoring and auditing quality. This is aimed at ensuring health passports are as effective as possible in supporting care leavers to maintain their health and wellbeing and addressing any needs.

Priority Five: co-production and engagement - placing the experiences and views of children at the centre of what we do and how we do it.

Key achievements in 2024/25

Children Living in Care Council (CLICC)

The Participation Team (part of Young Tower Hamlets) has continued to support the three CLICC Groups throughout the last year. They develop and deliver opportunities for care experienced young people to spend time with each other, enjoy social activities and events, learn new skills and share their feedback to help develop and improve services.

The groups provide a tailored offer to the Junior (8 to 12 year olds), Teen (13 to 17 years old) and Senior CLICC (18 to 24 year olds). The focus is on providing a varied and inspiring range of opportunities and members of each group actively develop the programmes for each part of the year with the Participation Team.

During 2024/25 CLICC activities have included:

- Trips to the cinema, theatre and bowling
- Christmas, Ramadan and EID Celebrations
- Collaboration with 'Feed London' to distribute food parcels
- Summer Fun Day
- Sea Cadets
- Visits to 'Go Ape'
- Money management course with the organisation 'Mybnk'
- English, maths & English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) sessions

Refurbishment of Kitcat Terrace

The vision for Kitcat has always been for it to be a 'home away from home' for our young people and the work that has been carried out during the last year has helped to bring this aspiration fully to life.

Kitcat has been highly valued by our young people for many years. It has long been a 'safe space' where they can spend time together, access support and engage with opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills.

With the improvement works that have been undertaken, facilities now include:

- a lounge area with comfy seating, book shelves, table tennis and video games
- a room for prayer and meditation
- spaces to meet with personal advisors and for tutoring and independent study
- an outdoor space which is ready just in time for summer.

Young people leaving care enjoy attending a welcoming, warm and friendly weekly group....young people have been involved in shaping service development, such as the exciting refurbishment of the 'Kitcat', their dedicated space, described by young people and some staff as a 'second home'. Young people are very involved with the corporate parenting board.....Ofsted Inspection Nov 2024

Priority Five: co-production and engagement

The difference having these facilities makes is already being felt with our young people hosting a large meal in the kitchen and dining area for 40 other children as well as professionals, leaders and politicians during Ramadan.

As our programme of events and activities grows Kitcat will operate as a truly multi-functional hub where there is a network of support from partner services and organisations across education, careers, health and for development of life skills.

University College London (UCL) Citizen Science Academy

Since December 2025, six of our care leavers have proudly taken part in the UCL Citizen Science Academy, working alongside researchers to shape real-world social change. Through this project they were trained as community-based researchers, using their lived experiences to influence policies and social action.

This unique project gave care leavers the opportunity to learn, train and work in an academic, corporate and community setting to complete their work as citizen scientists. The paid programme was tailored by our Education, Employment and Training Advisors with UCL leading to skills gained that can help to boost CVs and open doors.

The magazines produced as part of the project include insight, examples and ideas about what helps to create a 'good life' and support health and emotional wellbeing for young people who have experienced care. One care leaver has already secured an internship with UCL and will also feature in LBTH East End life newspaper. Involvement in this programme reflects our commitment to empowering care experienced young people to use their voices, develop new skills, and contribute meaningfully to research that impacts their futures.

**Virtual School and Participation Team Partnership**

By working together the Virtual School and Participation Team have enhanced and expanded the activities and events programmes that have been delivered for the Teen and Junior CLICC Groups. This collaboration has allowed colleagues to share expertise and connections to reach more young people, identify a wider range of opportunities and maximise take up.

Priority Five: co-production and engagement

National Care Leavers Week

The theme for 2024 was "All of Us, We Are One", focusing on creating connections and building stronger communities for care experienced individuals. The Town Hall joined in the lighting up of buildings to celebrate care leavers and bring attention to the challenges they can face. The Chair of the Tower Hamlets Senior CLICC Group was invited to speak at the 'Collaborate for Change' conference, delivering an impactful talk highlighting the challenges care leavers face, particularly regarding mental health.

'our mission is to ensure that every young person in care has the opportunity to thrive'

Podcasting to share experiences

We hosted a self-led podcast session during National Care Leavers Week 2024. It offered rich insight into their lives, challenges, and ideas for improving how we support young people through all stages of their lives. The young people spoke about the value of peer connection and expressed a strong interest in finding ways to mentoring younger children in care. Building on this, we are exploring how a dedicated podcast room could be established at Kitcat Terrace.

Activity highlights for 2025/26

- Launch event for re-opening of Kitcat Terrace to bring together young people, their parents and carers, professionals, partner organisations, Senior Managers and the Chair of the CPB (the Deputy Mayor) to celebrate the newly refurbished venue.
 - The event will be a chance to introduce the new facilities to those who haven't yet seen them and to encourage everyone to offer their support around how the space is used.
- Further development of Kitcat Terrace as a hub for delivery of support, services and programmes for our young people. This will include:
 - enhancing the garden and outdoor space – including a possible vegetable patch
 - installation of an IT suite – to assist the delivery of education, employment and training related support
 - a dedicated space to offer health related support and services
- The Participation Team will lead on further improvement and development of the CLICC Groups, including:
 - Co-production of activities and events programmes throughout each term and holiday period with children and young people.
 - Re-launch of the Kitcat Running Club and commencement of a new healthy eating cooking workshop to be held every Wednesday from May 2025.
 - Working with the three CLICC Group to plan and produce a video with the theme 'My life in care'.

Appendix A: Membership list for the Corporate Parenting Board (including officers who also report to the board)

NAME	ROLE	NAME	ROLE
Benjamin Yeboah	Group Manager, Through Care Service, LBTH	Lucy Satchellday	HoS Probation Service
Cllr Abdul Mannan	Councillor, LBTH	Nji Oranu	Head of Children's Regulated Services and Resources, LBTH
Cllr Bodrul Choudhury	Councillor, LBTH	Peter Cox	CAMHS in Social Care Team Lead, LBTH
Cllr Maium Talukdar	Chair of CPB, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning	Dr Razan Hadad	Interim Designated Doctor for Looked After Children (TH), NEL ICB
Cllr Nathalie Bienfait	Councillor, LBTH	Reagender Kang	Designated Nurse Looked After Children (TH), NHS North East London
David Cregan	Executive Headteacher of the Virtual School, LBTH	Samantha Anderson	Engagement Officer, Young People's Service (YPS), LBTH
FCA Representative	Foster Carers Association	Shahirul Bashar	Enrichment Education Offer, LBTH
Geraldine Donnell	Head of Service, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service, LBTH	Sheleena Powtoo	Improvement Delivery Lead, LBTH
Hasan Faruq	Youth Participation & Engagement Manager, Youth Service, LBTH	Shirley Quashie-Dunne	IRO Group Manager, Safeguarding & Quality Assurance Service, LBTH
Julie Lorraine	Corporate Director Resources	Steve Reddy	Director, Children's Services
Karen Swift	Director of Housing, LBTH	Susannah Beasley-Murray	Director of Supporting People, LBTH
Kelly Duggan	Head of Youth Justice and Young Peoples Service, LBTH	Suzanne Harding	Designated Nurse Looked After Children (Tower Hamlets), NHS North East London
Leo Major	Head of Service, Looked After Children and Through Care, LBTH	Tracy Stanley	Strategy & Policy Officer - Children and Culture, LBTH
Young People Representatives	Children Living in Care Council		

Appendix B – CPB Meetings and Agendas 2024/25

MEETING	KEY AGENDA ITEMS
Standing Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update from Foster Care Representatives • Update from Children Living in Care Council (CLICC) • Performance Report
March 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanency & Placements Report • Adopt London East Annual Report • Briefing on Children’s Social Care Government Reform – focus on Kinship Care Strategy • Launch of ‘Health Assessments’ information & promotion film • Progress update - Corporate Parenting Strategy
May 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update on health performance and regular activity • Project Initiation Document for Joint Strategic Needs Analysis (JSNA) for Children in our Care • Update on development of the NHS NEL Looked After Children/Young People and Care Leavers Strategy • Development of joint Health & Emotional Wellbeing assessment for Unaccompanied Minors
July 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barts Health Youth Forum Steering Group – sharing experiences on engagement and co-production • Refurbishment of Kitcat Terrace – update on plans • Refurbishment of Kitcat Terrace – young people’s vision for the future (on the theme of co-production)
October 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrichment Programme for Care Experienced Children and Young People • Education – outcomes, intervention and development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Key Benchmarks for Virtual School ○ Virtual School Briefing ○ Virtual School Annual Report 2024 to 2025
January 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback on Tower Hamlets ‘Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS)’ in Nov 2024 • Adopt London East (ALE) Annual Report 2023-24 • Placement Stability • Permanency Report • Fostering Annual Report • Fostering Recruitment Update

Appendix C – Children's Social Care Key Performance Indicator Report

Performance Measure	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Period	National	Statistical Neighbours
Looked After Children							
Number of Looked after Children at 31 March	332	301	277	284	Snapshot		
Children Looked After - rate per 10,000	51.7	46.8	43.1	45.0	Snapshot	70	69
Number of children becoming Looked After	182	134	149	168	Year to Date		
Number of children ceasing to be Looked After	156	167	168	160	Year to Date		
Percentage of children becoming Looked After that were re-entries within 2 years	2.7%	2.2%	6.7%	4.2%	Year to Date		
Average number of children Looked After placement moves	1.6	1.6	1.4	1.4	Rolling Year		
Maximum number of children Looked After placement moves	8.0	8.0	6.0	6.0	Rolling Year		
Long term stability of Looked After Children	58.0%	48%	68.8%	74.4%	Snapshot	68%	66%
Percentage of children Looked After with a named Social Worker (key worker or personal advisor)	100.0%	100%	100%	100%	Snapshot		
Percentage of children becoming Looked After with health assessment done within 20 days	45.7%	55.5%	53.5%	53%	Year to Date		
Percentage of children Looked After continuously for 12 months + with up-to-date Health assessments	93.9%	82.4%	92.7%	90.4%	Snapshot	89%	92%
Percentage of children Looked After continuously for 12 months + with up-to-date Dental checks	78.6%	90.7%	93.2%	91.5%	Snapshot	79%	79.5%

Performance Measure	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Period	National	Statistical Neighbours
Section 6 - Care experienced young people							
Percentage of allocated care experienced young people 'in touch' (17,18,19,20,21 year olds with activity updated within last year)	88.9%	98.1%	98.2%	98.5%	Snapshot		
Percentage of allocated care experienced young people 'in touch' and known to be in education, employment or training	64.3%	77.3%	76.8%	77.0%	Snapshot		
Percentage of allocated care experienced young people 'in touch' and known to be in suitable accommodation	83.6%	94.4%	92.8%	95.9%	Snapshot		
Percentage of allocated care experienced young people with a pathway plan	96.9%	95%	97.9%	97.5%	Snapshot		
Percentage of allocated care experienced young people with pathway plans updated in the last six months	87.5%	88.3%	97.3%	97.1%	Snapshot		

Performance Measure	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Period	National	Statistical Neighbours
Fostering and Adoption							
Number of Foster Carer Enquiries (initial contact)	235	127	512	141	Year to Date		
Number of Foster Carer Enquiries leading to Initial Visits	44	24	23	19	Year to Date		
Percentage of Foster Carer initial visits completed within five working days	46.2%	52.2%	50%	41%	Year to Date		
Total Approved Foster Carers (incl. family & friends)	102	115	116	96	Snapshot		
Number of children placed with In-house Foster Carers	116	123	108	94	Snapshot		
Number of children placed with Independent Fostering Agency Foster Carers	72	77	67	87	Snapshot		
Number of children in Residential Placements (incl. dual registered schools and mother & baby units)	22	18	19	25	Snapshot		

Performance Measure	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Period	National	Statistical Neighbours
Fostering and Adoption (continued)							
Average time between a child entering care and moving in with the adoptive family	509.5	572.4	600.4	560.0	Year to Date (3 years)		
Percentage of children waiting less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their family	35.7%	41.2%	57.1%	26.9%	Snapshot		
Percentage of children leaving care who are adopted	9%	7.2%	1.2%	3.8%	Year to Date	9%	7%
Number of Adoptions	14	12	2	6	Year to Date		
Number of Special Guardianship Orders granted for Looked After Children	4	5	9	6	Year to Date		
Percentage of black and minority ethnic children leaving care who are adopted	7.1%	5.4%	1.3%	4.6%	Year to Date		
Percentage of children ceasing to be Looked After because of Special Guardianship Orders	2.5%	3%	5.2%	3.8%	Year to Date	11%	8%
Percentage of Children Looked After placed for adoption within 12 months of agency decision	50%	75%	50%	100%	Year to Date		

Performance Measure	2022/23 Spring	2023/24 Spring	2024/25 Autumn	2024/25 Spring	Period
Virtual School					
Percentage of pupils making expected progress in English and Maths	65%	58%	67%	62%	Termly
Percentage of pupils where a Pupil Education Plans (PEP) meeting took place in the term	97%	99%	100%	98%	Termly
Percentage of Pupil Education Plans (PEPs) which were signed off and RAG rated green	84%	84%	84%	84%	Termly