

CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY

2018 -2020

Our Values

We start with the belief that children and young people are best cared for by their own families and in communities which they know, and where they are known, whenever it is safe for them to do so.

Where there is identified need, we believe that families have strengths and can engage with workers who know them and their children well to identify solutions and achieve positive and sustainable change.

Helping families to provide safe and stable homes for their children begins with early help where the goal is always to intervene in a timely way to prevent risk and need escalating and to improve outcomes related to educational, social and emotional needs.

When the threshold for a statutory intervention is reached, skilled and experienced social workers can support families to bring about change to provide their children with a safe and stable home life.

In our work with children, all decisions will have the best interests of the child as the paramount consideration. In a very small number of cases, it will be in the best interests of the child to be taken into the care of the local authority, either temporarily or permanently.

In these circumstances, we have a unique responsibility to the children in our care and our care leavers. We believe that the role that the Royal Borough of Greenwich Council plays in looking after children is one of the most important things we do.

We want to do everything we can to give children in our care and our care leavers the opportunities that other children get. This ranges from keeping an eye on their progress at school, to looking after their health and wellbeing, to preparing them for life as independent adults – and continuing to support them as they mature.

We are ambitious for the children in our care, encouraging them to aspire and seize new opportunities.

Being a Corporate Parent

When a child or young person is in our care the task of being a good parent becomes the responsibility of everyone working for the council, including the elected members and partner agencies.

All departments within the council, not just Children's Services, are responsible for considering how their work affects children in our care and care leavers. This is most relevant to housing, community, cultural and leisure services and safer communities but we are clear that all departments should consider how any new plans and policies might support and affect children looked after and care leavers.

We know that the council alone cannot supply all of the support that our children in care and care leavers need and, like any good parent, we will work closely with partners including police, health, business and the voluntary and community sector to understand and meet the specific needs of children in our care and care leavers.

Elected Members have a crucial role in making sure that the interests of children in our care and care leavers come first. The Cabinet sets the strategic direction of the Council's services and determine policy and priorities for the local community within the overall framework set by the government. Elected Members carry out a key scrutiny role looking at how well the local authority and its partners are acting as good corporate parents.

Our PROMISE

The Royal Borough of Greenwich has made a PROMISE to all children and young people in our care and care leavers.

We promise to:

Provide you with a safe and happy home

Respect you and your identity

Offer you support and guidance throughout your time in care

Make sure you get a good education and help you to achieve your aspirations

Involve you in decisions about your life

Support you to be active and stay healthy

Ensure you feel fully prepared for your transition into adulthood.

We cannot promise to do everything you ask, but we will always explain the reasons why.

Our Governance

To ensure that the council and partners keep that promise, the RBG Corporate Parenting Board meets quarterly. The Leader of the Council chairs it for Children's Services jointly with a representative from the Children in Care Council (CICC).

The membership is reviewed annually, but includes members, senior officers for the wider council, the head of the virtual school and representatives from health and others who may have a key contribution in delivering the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

Scheduled reports include:

- Adoption Annual Report
- Fostering Annual Report
- Mockingbird Annual Report
- The Placement Sufficiency Strategy
- The IRO Annual Report

The Corporate Parenting Board reports to Cabinet and its work is presented annually to Children and Young People's Scrutiny.

A Corporate Parenting Action Group that mirrors the membership of the strategic board takes forward actions and reports these to the board.

Our Looked After Children

On 31st March 2019, The Royal Borough of Greenwich had 479 looked after children, the lowest number since 2006, but still high as a percentage of children in the borough compared with London and national figures.

All children and young people and the circumstances under which they come into our care are unique and individual, but we know that the majority of children come into our care because of abuse and neglect.

Analysis of 2018–19 data shows that overall males are slightly more likely to come into care than females (60% to 40%) and this is consistent with the most recent London and England figures which are 59% and 56% respectively for males starting a period of care 2017–18. Children of mixed heritage are over represented within our children in our care population (19% of children in our care from 12% of the 0–17 population).

We have seen a further small reduction during 2018–19 in the numbers of children accommodated under Section 20 to the extent that they accounted for only 17% of the children in care on 31st March 2019 compared to 18% on that same date 2018 and 23% in 2017.

We have seen a shift in the age profile of children coming into our care which has continued through 2018–19, where 118 (63%) were aged 11 and older, a significant change since 2016 which was 46%. Of the 118 children and young people, 46 were unaccompanied minors.

26.5% of children in our care (for a year or more at 31st March 2018) have an Education, Health and Care Plan and an additional 29.0% have Special Educational Needs support.

We are committed to being evidence minded and using performance information, data and analysis to inform our planning and delivery of services. We believe that this, combined with relationship based and innovative practice, means that we can keep more children safe with their families and safely reduce the number of children in care.

However, our primary driver is consistent across all priorities: to ensure that we look after the right children, at the right time, to achieve the right outcomes.

Our Priorities for 2018 – 2020

We know that the majority of children and young people who come into in our care do so because of the inability of their parents to offer safe and nurturing environments in the family home. This can sometimes have a significant and lasting effect.

Many of the children who come into our care are already disadvantaged in relation to their peers. Good corporate parenting seeks to redress this by championing the needs and views of children and having high ambitions for them.

The quality of our practice and the quality of educational, physical and emotional health and care provision must all be measured against whether, as good parents, this would be what we wanted for our own children.

In our culture of continuous improvement where improvement is not a project, but 'what we do', providing the best service and achieving the best outcomes for every child in our care and every young person leaving our care will always be our goal.

Our priorities for improvement are:

- Providing alternatives to care where it is appropriate
- Ensuring that children secure permanence in a timely way
- Providing placement choice and stability
- Making education everyone's business
- Improving the experience and progress of care leavers
- Using feedback, research, intelligence and learning from complaints and placement breakdowns to improve practice and the quality of services.