

<b>LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN</b>	<b>WARDS:</b> All
<p><b>REPORT TITLE</b></p> <p>Themed Debate on Considering Care-Experience a Locally Protected Characteristic – Follow up Report.</p>	
<p><b>REPORT OF</b></p> <p>Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Equalities and Cohesion</p> <p>Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families</p>	
<p><b>FOR SUBMISSION TO</b></p> <p>Council</p>	<p><b>DATE</b></p> <p>4<sup>th</sup> March 2024</p>
<p><b>SUMMARY OF REPORT</b></p> <p>This report provides an overview of the Full Council themed debate on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2024.</p> <p>The debate reflected on the current support provisions for our care-experienced residents in Camden alongside current thinking to ensure Care Experience is treated as a locally protected characteristic. The debate also delved into role of the Council as corporate parents to the children and people with care experience in the borough whilst also seeking to influence national policy in addressing the need for social mobility to be included in the revisions ongoing of the Equality Act 2010.</p> <p>This report summarises the key points made by the 6 speakers, and the subsequent debate at Full Council.</p> <p>A motion was also unanimously passed at the Council meeting to treat care experienced as a locally protected characteristic in Camden. The report highlights the next steps from the discussion and further improvement suggestions on the current offer to care experienced people.</p> <p><b>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information</b></p> <p>No documents that require listing were used in the preparation of this report.</p> <p><b>Contact Officer:</b></p> <p>Brenda Amisi-Hutchinson, Head of Corporate Parenting, London Borough of Camden, 5 Pancras Square N1C 4AG. Email- <a href="mailto:brenda.amisi-hutchinson@camden.gov.uk">brenda.amisi-hutchinson@camden.gov.uk</a></p>	

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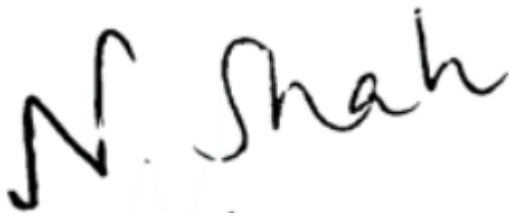
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### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Council is asked to note the report.

Signed: The report has been approved by

Cllr Nadia Shah, Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Equalities and Cohesion

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "N. Shah". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "N" and a long, sweeping underline.

Cllr Marcus Boyland, Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families

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Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2024

## 1. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The term 'care experienced young people' is used in this paper as updated language for 'care leavers'. In recent years, the care-experienced community have preferred the latter term. Although the term 'care leavers' is entrenched in law and statute, Camden have chosen to be more intentional with our use of language and thereby the Care Leavers service is now named the Care Experienced service.
- 1.1 The definition of 'care experience' has not been universally agreed and can vary nationally. As part of this report, 'care experienced' will apply to young people who have been 'looked after' at some point in their childhood and are entitled to receive services under the Children Act 1989, Leaving Care Act 2000 and the Children and Social Work Act 2017. As such, it does not include children who have been adopted as their support and services are covered under the Adoption Act 2000. However, we also recognise that 'care experience' can be interpreted as a lifelong characteristic – which goes further than the definition of 'care leaver' attached to the statutory duty of supporting young people leaving care between 18-25. Camden have a track record of offering outstanding services to our care experienced young-people – and in Camden's last OFSTED inspection, Camden were granted 'outstanding' with Ofsted noting that "*the care leavers service is rooted in relational practice, which means that PAs build warm professional relationships and show pride in young people's achievements*". Camden's offer for care-experienced has a well-established and carefully designed local offer, including mental health support, a higher education grant, paid travel costs, pad laptop and vacation accommodation or fund, subsidised gym membership.
- 1.2 Since September 2023, Camden has also been offering 6 internships ring-fenced for care experienced aged 16-24. The internships are 18 months long and paid at London Living wage, alongside a £3,000 bursary to support with living costs. The scheme aims to replicate the same work experience and professional networking opportunities that parents are often able to offer their children, thereby giving interns the confidence, career guidance, and work skills needed to raise their aspirations and progress onto an apprenticeship or a job. In partnership with the Camden Apprenticeships team, Camden's Children Looked After and the Care Experience services, Drive Forward Foundation is providing a package of support to facilitate placements.
- 1.3 Camden children who are looked after, and care experienced young people are at the forefront of reviewing and redesigning our services. The children in care council (CICC) provide a voice for care experienced young people, make suggestions to make services better and get involved in making changes and improvements. Their voice is heard by senior managers and councillors at the Corporate Parenting Board and other council meetings. The annual Young Inspectors programme undertakes inspections of a wide range of services with recommendations making an impact on service planning and development across Children's Services.

- 1.4 As well as outstanding children's services for care-experienced young people, Camden has a range of borough-wide strategic commitments to supporting our children in care and, those who have experience of the care system to thrive. For instance, within 'We Make Camden', our Youth Mission includes care experienced as a group we prioritise. We want to ensure that those with experience of care have access to Camden's huge opportunities, with sector-leading public services, a rich community of youth activities and exciting global and local employers. A key focus of the Diversity Mission is also to create the conditions necessary to deliver leadership opportunities for future generations of Camden's young people.
- 1.5 The Equality Act 2010 is the legal framework designed to protect the right of equal opportunity and unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation based on someone's personal and protected characteristics, including race and ethnicity, pregnancy and maternity, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, gender, faith or non-faith, marriage, and civil partnership. The Act does not include 'care experience' as a protected characteristic.
- 1.6 The Independent Review for Children's Social Care led by Josh MacAlister outlined that "*many care-experienced people face discrimination, stigma, and prejudice in their day-to-day lives. Public perceptions of care experience centre on the idea that children are irredeemably damaged and that can lead to discrimination and assumptions being made*". Nationally, care-experienced young people can experience poor outcomes, but these outcomes are not uniform. For example, 26% of the homeless population have spent time in care; 24% of the prison population in England have care experience, and 41% of 19–21-year-old care Experienced young people are not in education, employment or training (NEET) compared to 12% of all other young people in the same age group. The Care Review recognised the often-negative outcomes for people with care experience and recommended that the government make 'Care Experienced' a protected characteristic.
- 1.7 As of February 2024, the number of councils adopting the policy has risen to 78 after a concerted campaign by Terry Galloway of Care Leaver Offer and other organisations involved in campaigning for the rights of those with care experience. On 29<sup>th</sup> January following the Full Council Debate, Camden became the 76<sup>th</sup> council to pass a motion to make care-experience a protected characteristic. Mr Galloway, who himself has experience of the care system and now is an active campaigner for the rights of care experienced young people, firmly advocates for making care experience a protected characteristic as he believes "care experienced people can face significant barriers which impact them throughout their life, and despite the resilience of many care- experienced people, society too often does not take their needs into account."

## 2. SUMMARY OF FULL COUNCIL DEBATE

- 2.1. The debate was introduced by Cllr Marcus Boyland, Cabinet Member for Best Start in Life and Cllr Nadia Shah, Cabinet Member for Voluntary and Community Sector Cohesion and Equalities. Cllr Boyland reflected on how valuable hearing from those with lived experience is – he reflected on a care-experienced young person who is part of the council’s Youth Justice Board, and on a pre-Council session with councillors where some care-experienced young people powerfully shared their experiences and why making care-experienced a protected characteristic would make a difference to them with employment. Cllr Shah outlined that care-experience is not included in the equality act but our discussion at Full Council reaffirmed our commitment socio-economic inclusion.
- 2.2. Terry Galloway, co-founder of the Care Leaver Offer, and campaigner for care-experience spoke at the debate. Terry talked about his own lived experience of the care system – noting that by the time he left care he lived in more than 100 places. Terry shared that his siblings weren’t as lucky as him, with his sister who had drug and alcohol dependencies had children who were taken into care, and was later killed by her boyfriend and his brother also having children taken into the care system. Terry talked passionately about the huge barriers faced by care-experienced people, and the importance of the national campaign to get care-experience recognised as a protected characteristic locally and also the importance of lobbying the government to make this a revision to the equality act.
- 2.3. Lemn Sissay OBE also has lived experience of the care-system – he is a poet and broadcaster, campaigner and author of the book ‘My name is why’. He is also a trustee of the Foundling Museum in Camden. Lemn Sissay used his speech to highlight the poor outcomes experienced by care-experience people, including asking “*Why do care experience people have the worst outcomes than any other group in the United Kingdom? Why is it care experience people are 70% more likely to die prematurely? Why is it at least 25% of people that are homeless are care leavers?*”. He emphasised that making care-experience a protected characteristic in local authorities across the country was an important step.
- 2.4. Cathy Ashley, Chief Executive of Family Rights Group also spoke at the debate. She spoke about the Lifelong links programme which is led by the Family Rights Group. Lifelong links ensures that young people in care have a positive support network around them to help during their time in care and in adulthood. Cathy emphasised the importance of relationships for those in the care-system and announced that Camden are the first local authority to fund Lifelong links for care-experienced young people up to the age of 25.
- 2.5. Rod Weston-Bartholomew, Assistant Director for Impact Care Journeys at Barnardo’s, spoke about research Barnardo’s have done about the double discrimination faced by Black children in care. The work found that black children faced inequalities and were over-represented in the care system, and that systemic racism led to black care-experienced young people being treated differently by many of the services they came into contact with. Rod outlined a

number of things the research recommended including - the need to improve the experience of Black Children in foster care and need for national funding, the need for improved access to mental health support for Black Children in Care and to reduce the over-criminalisation of children in the care system.

- 2.6. Two personal advisors, Angela and Anthony from the Council's Care-experienced service also spoke. They brought to life the challenges faced by the care-experienced young people they support on a daily basis– this included significant challenges in accessing mental health support, the challenges with accessing financial support through the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) and challenges with housing and independent accommodation. The personal advisors outlined the positive difference that making care-experienced a protected characteristic in Camden would make in ensuring young people got access to support. The personal advisors also talked about how a large amount of support stops at 18 – for instance when care-experienced turn 18, their vulnerabilities aren't considered in the criminal justice system. Care-experienced young people also face long waiting lists for mental health support after they turn 18.
- 2.7. There were several questions from Cllrs. These included a question from Cllr Francis who asked about Camden's Youth Mission and asked speakers for their ideas of how to support care-experienced young people into employment. Terry Galloway talked about the importance of businesses being brought into the work and signing up to do more around supporting care-experienced into employment.
- 2.8. Other speaker questions included Cllr Jirira's about the Unaccompanied asylum seekers who are in care. She outlined the trauma that they have experienced previously and the lack of mental health support and asked the Cabinet member to explore mental health and emotional health support. Cllr Gale talked about the importance of councillors' Corporate Parenting responsibility and urged colleagues to support the motion. Cllr Greenwood referenced the lived experience testimonies from care-experienced young people and asked what more can be done to further support young people beyond the age of 25.
- 2.9. Cllr Boyland and Shah closed the debate by thanking the speakers for sharing their stories and lived experience and highlighting Camden's commitment to doing more around care-experience and tackling inequality and discrimination.
- 2.10. A motion, brought forward by Cllr Boyland and seconded by Cllr Shah, was then brought forward. The motion to treat care experienced as a locally protected characteristic in Camden was unanimously passed by all Councillors cross-party.

### **3. NEXT STEPS**

- 3.1 At the debate, Cllr Boyland announced free Wi-Fi offer for care-experienced young people up until the age of 25, in all accommodation types including private rented sector. This is national best practice, recommended as part of

the Care Leaver local offer and recognises the challenges that care experienced young people face in setting up home independently. Camden has a wide range of work around digital inclusion, with it being one of 6 challenges within We Make Camden, which this works sits within. Colleagues from the Care Experienced Service are working with strategy colleagues to work through the next steps of this offer and providing it to young people. This will be funded by the care-experienced service.

- 3.2 The Equalities Service is working closely with our Legal team to ensure, legal obligations reflect this change, but also that our Equality Impact Assessments further define care experienced. This work has already begun and will be continuing.
- 3.3 Camden's current Corporate Parenting Strategy is due to be refreshed in 2024. Following the debate, a range of work is planned to engage with services and partners across the Council and Borough to secure commitments across services. This recognises that corporate parenting is everyone's responsibility and there is much more work to do to ensure that care-experienced young people access the support that they need from across services and partners. This work will be owned by Camden's Corporate Parenting Board.
- 3.4 Within We Make Camden, there are four missions. One of these is the Youth Mission which outlines that by 2025, every young person has access to economic opportunity that enables them to be safe and secure. We Make Camden outlines that Camden is home to huge opportunities for young people, with sector-leading public services, a rich community of youth activities, and exciting global and local employers. And yet, not all young people have access to these opportunities – or can translate their ambitions and talents into opportunities that help them to be safe and secure Care-experienced is one of 5 priority cohorts in Camden's Youth Mission. Cabinet Members are running quarterly member sessions on the missions with Officer, and the Youth Mission member session taking place on 18<sup>th</sup> March led by Cllr Francis and with a focus on care-experience and young people in the Youth Justice System, both priority cohorts in the Youth Mission. The session will provide the opportunity to talk about what further Camden can do internally and with partners around care-experienced and young people in the youth justice system.
- 3.5 Mental Health was a key theme discussed in the debate. Personal advisors talked about the challenges with long mental health waiting lists post 18, and the challenges with trauma that young people face. Rod also shared that Barnardo's research has highlighted the need for additional mental health support for black children in the care system. Following the debate, Heads of Service have spoken to staff in the care-experienced service who have raised the challenges of supporting young people who are suicidal. A meeting is being set up in February with colleagues from Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), the Royal Free Hospital, Camden Public Health and Strategy to explore how better to target intervention and wellbeing support to our care experienced people.

- 3.6 Following the debate, the Council have been promoting the work to make this is a protected characteristic to partners, including Camden Learning. Governors from schools across Camden are keen to understand further how they can apply this, and an update is scheduled at a Governors meeting organised by Camden Learning in early May.

#### **4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There is no legal comment.

#### **5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1. The Executive Director Corporate Services has been consulted and has no comments to add.

#### **6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no expected environmental implications.

#### **7. APPENDICES**

- 7.1 There are no appendices to the report.

**REPORT ENDS**