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Dear Mr Verma

### **Focused visit to Newham local authority children's services**

This letter summarises the findings of the focused visit to Newham local authority children's services on 24 and 25 January 2024. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Nhlanganiso Nyathi and Brenda McLaughlin.

Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements and support for young people in care aged 16 and 17 and moving into adulthood, and for care-experienced young people aged 18 to 25. This visit focused specifically on:

- Quality of preparation and support into adulthood.
- Quality and suitability of accommodation.
- Care-experienced young people with specific needs, for example those at risk of criminal exploitation and serious youth violence and those in and out of custody.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. Inspectors looked at a range of evidence, including case discussions with personal advisers (PAs), social workers and managers. They also looked at local authority performance management and quality assurance information and children's records.

### **Headline findings**

Since the last ILACS inspection in 2022, improvements to the care-experienced young people service have been sustained and the leaving care services remain highly effective. Workforce stability has helped ensure that the needs of most care-experienced young people are well met. Care-experienced young people and those aged 16 and 17 and moving into adulthood are well supported, with the vast majority, including those who live out of the borough, in suitable and stable accommodation. Care-experienced young people with specific additional support needs, such as risks linked to criminal exploitation and serious youth violence, receive strong and effective support. Support for young people in custody or young offender institutions is effective. However, for a small number of these young people, the support they receive during their time in custody and on their release is not always

reflective of their needs. Management oversight is not consistently recorded and there are gaps in the frequency of supervision for some practitioners.

### **What needs to improve in this area of social work practice?**

- Support and planning for care-experienced young people in custody.
- The timeliness of electronic recording.
- The frequency of supervision for PAs.

### **Main findings**

Care-experienced children and young people receive help from teams of highly committed and determined staff who know them well and work diligently with partners, providing effective practical advice and help when needed. Most care-experienced young people are visited regularly, with the frequency being consistent with their levels of need and risk.

Pathway plans are reviewed in a timely manner, being updated when care-experienced young people's circumstances or support needs change. Plans encapsulate care-experienced young people's holistic needs, including their accommodation, health and wider support needs. They are sensitively written, with care-experienced young people incorporating their views and aspirations.

PAs carefully explore the next steps necessary to support care-experienced young people towards independence at a pace reflective of their needs, and this is reflected in their plans. Tenacious PAs, supported by partner agencies such as the Youth Empowerment Service, actively help young people to develop the necessary skills to successfully navigate the opportunities and challenges of adult life.

Care-experienced young people are routinely provided with information and support to ensure that they are aware of their rights and entitlements, through the well-defined local offer and meaningful conversations with their workers. This helps care-experienced young people to make informed decisions regarding their future.

Care-experienced young people value the support provided at The Cove, a dedicated meeting space and workspace for care-experienced young people that offers an extensive range of activities and support, as well as the opportunity to meet with peers. Activities include sessions on sexual and emotional health, cooking and financial well-being. Activities delivered at The Cove, facilitated by the virtual school, provide opportunities and support for care-experienced young people to engage or re-engage in education, employment and training (EET).

Most visits to care-experienced children and young people have a clear focus. The majority of records of visits are written sensitively, with an emphasis on building and sustaining relationships with care-experienced young people. Their voices are listened

to and acted on and used to inform decision-making for their future. Active use of social media enables staff to keep in regular contact with care-experienced young people in order to facilitate a better understanding of their needs. For some care-experienced young people, records of contact with their PAs and information concerning their current circumstances are not up to date, meaning that this important information is not always readily accessible.

PAs are allocated to children in care in a timely way at the age of 17, with clearly delineated joint roles with the allocated social worker until young people reach 18. This enables PAs to build relationships with care-experienced young people before becoming their main allocated worker, and to undertake specific work focused on life skills, helping to support them into adulthood. Some young people with more complex needs retain the support of their allocated social worker post-18, enabling them to have the benefit of consistency of worker as they move into adulthood.

PAs are attuned to understanding issues relating to the effects of any trauma that care-experienced young people may be experiencing. This helps PAs to plan effectively for their emotional health needs as they prepare for more independent living.

Care-experienced young people continue to receive positive support from their PAs after the age of 21 and PAs are persistent in making efforts to maintain contact with young people who choose not to actively engage on reaching this milestone. While PAs and social workers offer effective support for young people in custody or young offender institutions, for a small number of young people, plans to support them during periods of custody are insufficiently defined, and not reflective of their level of need; plans could benefit from greater clarity in ensuring that they are reflective of the level of need. Plans to support young people on their release are not always timely enough to help them to resettle into their communities and engage in meaningful activities.

Most care-experienced young people are in suitable, safe and stable accommodation, including those who live outside Newham. Most accommodation is reflective of young people's support needs and young people have some degree of choice in the accommodation provided. 'Staying put' arrangements with former foster carers are supported and actively promoted for those care-experienced young people who would benefit from the continuity and additional support that these arrangements provide.

The local authority's sufficiency strategy is clear and identifies the steps necessary to ensure that the authority can meet the diverse accommodation needs of care-experienced young people in the borough. A localised approach to commissioning provides choice and multiple pathways for housing and accommodation provision and support. Quality assurance of semi-supported accommodation is enacted through a range of assurance activities, to ensure that such accommodation is meeting the local authority's expectations.

The partnership response to sharing information about care-experienced young people at risk from criminal exploitation, serious youth violence and modern slavery and those missing from home and care is impressive, pioneering and well defined. The intelligence tool that incorporates real-time information held by the multi-agency partnership from their respective data bases is effective. This ensures that strategic and operational managers across agencies act swiftly together to reduce extra-familial risks to care-experienced young people in local community spaces.

Information on risks is shared and analysed at daily briefings with a wide range of relevant professionals. Panel meetings, such as the multi-agency child exploitation panel and the Newham Information and Intelligence Partnership Board, enhance management oversight on plans at an inter-agency level. This helps to ensure that risks are understood and actions to keep young people safe are embedded within pathway planning. Professionals are alert to situations, circumstances and relationships that increase potential risks for care-experienced young people.

Care-experienced young people are actively involved in shaping service improvements, including the provision of accommodation and life-skills support, through their representation at the corporate parenting board and the care leavers' forum, and their contact with senior leaders.

Most care-experienced young people are in EET activities, which helps them to move successfully into adult life. PAs, social workers, key workers and staff from the virtual school actively encourage young people to achieve. Staff spoke positively about the virtual school and the partnership with University College London, which has led to a model of practice offering a wide range of EET pathways, including apprenticeships. Newham has a high number of care-experienced young people in higher education; they have access to relevant financial support and to suitable accommodation outside term times.

Leaders and managers at Newham know their service well. Staff enjoy working in Newham and feel well supported by visible and caring managers and senior leaders. Staff report manageable workloads that enable them to undertake reflective work with their care-experienced young people. Managers know that recording of oversight needs to be more consistently evidenced on records, as there were some gaps in the frequency of supervision; managers are committed to improving this. Quality assurance activity has been strengthened and is impacting on practice, and audits are enabling a better understanding of the service and the impact of work on outcomes for care-experienced young people.

Ofsted will take the findings from this focused visit into account when planning the next inspection or visit.

Yours sincerely

Nhlanganiso Nyathi  
**His Majesty's Inspector**