



Department  
for Education

# **Evaluation of the Care Leavers Partnership: Southwark Council and Catch22**

**Evaluation report**

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**Claudia Mollidor, Raynette Bierman,  
Ellis Akhurst (Ipsos MORI)**

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## Key messages

In May 2017, Southwark Council and Catch22 received funding from the Department for Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme to improve services for care leavers. While many other projects in the Innovation Programme delivered interventions with defined targets and boundaries as recommended by the first Round of the Innovation Programme, the CLP sought whole-system change for care leaving services, initially in the form of a joint delivery venture, which had not been done before. Based on the findings of an independent evaluation, the following recommendations build on insights about what worked well and less well in the project's delivery.

### Project planning and set-up

1. Commissioners and local authorities should consider the feasibility of service-wide innovations that are in early planning stages to ensure they are realistic and not overambitious for the timeframes. Parameters and milestones for project activities should be agreed through the development of the project's Theory of Change, including outcomes with associated (short, medium and long-term) timeframes, and a delivery plan.
2. Where projects aim to make service-wide changes, sufficient lead-in time should be built in to recruit staff, develop and embed new processes, and initiate cultural change among staff. To free up time to support the innovation, senior managers could consider co-opting council operational expertise, and where appropriate, project leads could consider working with external change management experts. If there are plans to pilot an approach with a specific team or division, clear communications are needed for both pilot staff and wider service staff, offering clear explanations about how the pilot will affect both groups and the expected benefits (based on the Theory of Change).
3. Senior managers should consider staff sensitivities before engaging an external organisation to co-lead change. Consult staff early on and assess the benefits of working with a partner as opposed to in-house delivery (through additional funding). Benefits should outweigh potential tension and disruption. Where partnerships are formed, ensure that the key roles and responsibilities are clear from the outset, for example, whether certain strands are led by one partner or the other, and who is responsible in each organisation for cascading information down to the wider teams.

### Project delivery

4. If planned activities change during delivery, detailed consideration ought to be given to how the changes will affect intended outcomes for the service, staff and young people, particularly in the specified timeframes. This should be guided by the project's Theory of Change. If there are wider challenges and unexpected

pressure on services, commissioners and project leads should consider whether pursuing innovative interventions is feasible and beneficial in the timeframes.

5. Project leads should build in co-design and youth participation opportunities from the outset to ensure that young people's voices are heard, for example, in the development of the project's delivery plan and Theory of Change. This should also include feedback loops so that young people have a better understanding of how their views will inform the project. Project leads should also consider how to reach and engage a wide audience of care leavers in both co-production and targeted interventions. For instance, they could explore using social media platforms to highlight opportunities and services.
6. Project leads should establish and further develop current links with specialist services to work with young people who have more complex needs or higher risk, as well as with local organisations and businesses who can offer high quality opportunities that improve employment prospects. Encourage dedicated roles, like the Experienced Practitioner role designed for this project, to lead this work.



# Executive summary

## Introduction

This report sets out findings for the evaluation of the Care Leavers Partnership jointly delivered by Southwark Council and Catch22. The project was awarded £1.7 million in 2017 as part of the Department for Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme. The Department commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct this evaluation.

## The project

The Care Leavers Partnership (CLP) project, which ran from May 2017 to March 2020, set out in the funding bid the aim of “working together to improve Leaving Care services for young people in Southwark by working across boundaries, reshaping the service delivery model, unlocking capacity in the community, and co-designing solutions”. Following a period focused on the design and development of the CLP, Southwark Council and Catch22 identified a set of delivery workstreams to trial new ways of working with staff and care leavers. Some workstreams were systems-focused, affecting the whole service, while others involved direct work with smaller groups of young people. Key activities included:

### Improving the service:

- Recruiting and embedding multi-disciplinary expertise through new ‘Experienced Practitioners’ with specialist knowledge and practice experience to increase expertise and build capacity and skill among Personal Advisers (PAs)
- Reviewing the practice model and devising and implementing new staff training
- Raising awareness within the Council of corporate parenting responsibilities through roadshows and corporate parent mentors
- Identifying local opportunities, building partnerships and unlocking social capital
- Reviewing finance systems to improve ways of working for staff

### Improving direct work with young people:

- Sending monthly CLP newsletters and updating the website and Local Offer, including sending a hard copy to care leavers in the post
- Updating the pathway plan (including feasibility of a digital app option)
- Re-introducing group-work activities including regular social events to reduce social isolation and improve wellbeing and independent living skills

- Delivering the 'Unlock-It programme' to support young people into education, employment and training
- Delivering the 'ReConnect programme' for young people to re-engage in networks
- Undertaking data analysis on the characteristics and needs of certain groups, including those in custody and living out of borough

The project originally intended to develop a Care Leavers Trust, an Alternative Delivery Vehicle (ADV) and legal entity jointly owned by Southwark Council and Catch22. However, following an options appraisal, the CLP agreed to pursue in-house improvement rather than the ADV due to its perceived risks to the service and practical, financial and technical challenges. The project also introduced 'STAIRS', a service practice model used in Southwark's 'Keeping Families Together' team, to one of the care leaving teams as a pilot. STAIRS is a framework for staff within psychological and social work practice with children and families to use when considering which therapeutic and practical approaches are most appropriate for a particular situation.<sup>1</sup> It sets out a process for staff to assess a problem, choose an intervention, and then re-visit and revise this depending on the outcomes observed. However, the approach was discontinued due to challenges encountered by the pilot team in implementing the model.

## The evaluation

The evaluation involved a mixed-methods design that collected data from a variety of audiences, including project delivery staff, senior stakeholders, frontline workers, and care leavers. Methods included:

- Reviewing key documentation, including internal analysis and evaluation
- Interviews with project delivery staff and senior stakeholders
- A focus group with the STAIRS pilot team social workers and PAs
- Interviews with care leavers supported by the STAIRS pilot team (towards the start of the pilot) and those directly engaged in CLP activities, for example the co-design and group-work (towards the end of the evaluation)
- Outcome measurement surveys among care leavers
- Analysis of statutory data available for Southwark's population of care leavers

The evaluation team also conducted workshops with care leavers in March 2018 to inform the survey methods and with the project delivery team in December 2018 to update the project's theory of change (which was subsequently revised).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.taylorconway.org.uk/stairs>

Given the ongoing development of the project, the evaluation plan was reviewed and adapted iteratively. For example, the evaluation included a quasi-experimental design comparing outcomes for care leavers supported by the STAIRS pilot team with outcomes for care leavers in other teams. However, the model was not able to be taken forward to full delivery, meaning comparative analysis was restricted to using aggregate statutory data for Southwark and its statistical neighbours.

## Key findings

Southwark Council and Catch22's ambitious plans to implement whole system change were not fully-formed in the original bid, which resulted in an iterative approach to trialling new ways to improve services for staff and young people, rather than following a clearly defined project plan from start to finish. The project team monitored each activity's progress in real-time and made decisions about whether and how to continue. This approach resulted in several significant changes to the project, suggesting it was over-ambitious for a time-constrained innovation project. In addition, there were project delays relating to changes in key staff and the complex nature of making structural and cultural changes to service provision. In some cases, this meant activities were discontinued or delayed, including the ADV and STAIRS pilot. This caused some disruption in the service and limited the project's impact where new activities were introduced late in delivery.

Despite changes and delays, there was positive evidence that the CLP delivered multiple activities that aligned with and contributed to addressing key gaps in Southwark Council's provision of services for care leavers. For example:

- The project launched a new website for care leavers, updated and posted out a hardcopy of the Local Offer to care leavers, and revised the Pathway Plan. These changes were designed to address feedback from young people that they were not aware of all the support available to them and felt that pathway planning was not designed with their needs in mind. The updated Pathway Plan was co-designed with both staff and young people to better incorporate key practice principles, for example, shared goal setting. However, it was implemented in late 2019 and young people interviewed had not yet completed pathway planning using the new version.
- Staff felt that the recruitment of the Experienced Practitioners supported care leaving teams to respond to specific challenges in specialist areas: substance abuse, housing, education, employment and training, youth work, vulnerable young people, and social capital development. These roles also aim to reduce burden on social workers and PAs by re-allocating complex cases to them for more intensive individual work (where appropriate).
- Based on interviews with staff from both Southwark Council and Catch22, the project successfully engaged other Council services and local partners to identify

new opportunities for young people, especially related to education, employment and volunteering.

- Young people involved in co-design and participation work felt the CLP resulted in more opportunities for their voices to be heard, though they wanted more feedback on how information on their views was used. Young people involved in group-work highlighted how it increased their social interaction and improved their confidence.

Due to the ongoing development and related delays of the project, many elements were still embedding by the end of the evaluation and therefore their impact had not been felt across the service. This was reflected in mostly non-significant outcome changes among care leavers according to both survey and statutory data during the timeframe. Following the evaluation, Southwark Council plans to monitor changes to care leaver outcomes in-house. This responsibility will be distributed across the Experienced Practitioners, and through continued consultation with SpeakerBox, Southwark's children in care forum.

## Lessons and implications

The key lessons and implications are set out below.

- Southwark Council faced internal and external challenges that affected its ability to design, develop and deliver the project's highly ambitious objectives within the timeframe. Future projects should aim to set a clear delivery plan from the outset and ensure delivery is aligned with a robust theory of change.
- Southwark Council staff were unsure how the project and potential ADV would affect them, resulting in some tension at the outset of the project between Southwark Council and Catch22. Consequently, it took longer than expected for the organisations to build a positive working relationship. Future projects should consult further with staff to open more dialogue on the vision of the project and respond to any staff concerns upfront.
- Several significant changes to delivery occurred, which caused some confusion and disruption for staff. Activities introduced later in the project did not have sufficient time to embed and therefore their impact by the end of the evaluation was limited or unknown. Requirements to deliver an action plan upon commissioning could minimise unexpected service disruption.
- By building in plans to sustain links within the Council and in the local community through one of the Experienced Practitioner roles, Southwark Council should seek to harness and generate social capital.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> There are multiple definitions of social capital, though many reference the opportunities that are created through the development and mobilisation of social relationships and networks. For example, benefits may include gaining access to other social actors (Knoke, 1999), assisting the acquisition of valuable skills and traits (Loury, 1992), or facilitating coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam, 1995).

- The project's emphasis on consultation was welcomed by young people, however, this reached limited numbers, with most care leavers not directly engaged in the changes being implemented by the project. As the changes to practice become embedded, future evaluation will be necessary to understand the longer-term impact of the CLP project.

# 1. Overview of the project

## 1.1 Project context

The project took place in the inner London Borough of Southwark, home to a rapidly growing population of more than 317,000 people (ONS, 2019). Southwark has a younger population (median age: 33.4 years old) than both London and England averages (35.3 and 39.9, respectively) due to a larger number of young adults in their 20s and 30s. Among those entering adulthood, as of April 2019, there were 398 young people aged 17-21 years old<sup>3</sup> who were previously in care and entitled to leaving care services (DfE, 2020a). In line with legislation extending support for care leavers up to 25 (DfE, 2018), Southwark Council's Leaving Care service provides support work for over 500 young people aged 16-25 years old. Based on an analysis completed by Southwark Council in October 2018, there were more male care leavers (60%) than female (40%), and approximately half live outside of Southwark, though many reside within London.

Southwark is highly diverse, particularly among those under 20 – for example, 43% of primary school children's first language is not English, compared with 21% nationally (LAIT, 2020). Reflecting this, Southwark Council's analysis in 2018 found that 70% of care leavers were from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds and 50% were born outside the UK including 20% with unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC) status.

Despite improving its ranking since 2015, Southwark continues to have high deprivation relative to other boroughs according to the Indices of Deprivation (MHCLG, 2019). People living in deprived areas are more likely to have worse life chances than similar people living in more prosperous areas.<sup>4</sup> This includes outcomes for which care leavers are known to be disproportionately disadvantaged, such as being more likely to be unemployed, live in poorer housing and have worse health and educational outcomes. For instance, 39% of care leavers aged 19-21 are not in education, employment or training (NEET), compared with 13% of all 19-24-year olds in England (DfE, 2019/2020b). Care leavers also have a higher risk of homelessness and likelihood of teenage pregnancy (DfE, 2015) and often have limited social networks and experience loneliness (Baker, 2018).

Care leavers are entitled to support from local authorities through dedicated Personal Advisers (PA). At the start of the project, Southwark Council had 4 Leaving Care teams,

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<sup>3</sup> Local authorities are only required to stay in contact and keep records of care leavers up to their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. Support varies significantly for those aged 21-25 and data is not included in statutory returns.

<sup>4</sup> The State of the Nation 2018-19: Social Mobility in Great Britain demonstrates the disparity in life chances and opportunities which people from and living in deprived areas face compared to those from more prosperous and affluent areas. Report available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/798404/SMC\\_State\\_of\\_the\\_Nation\\_Report\\_2018-19.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/798404/SMC_State_of_the_Nation_Report_2018-19.pdf)

each with a team manager, senior social worker, 2 social workers and 2 PAs. The service has since expanded to 6 teams, one of which focuses on young people aged 21-25 and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. While Ofsted rated Southwark Council's children's services as 'Good' in 2017, the rating in relation to the 'experience and progress of care leavers' was 'requires improvement' (Ofsted, 2017).

The project was influenced by the findings of the 'Your Life Beyond Care' survey (Baker, 2018) and New Belongings project (2016). The 'Your Life Beyond Care' survey was a subjective well-being survey to understand how care leavers see their own lives. In Southwark, the results highlighted that care leavers scored lower than young people in the general population across all measurements of well-being, particularly levels of anxiety. The New Belongings project supported 29 local authorities to improve their services for care leavers. In Southwark, the New Belongings project focused on improving the Council's engagement with their care leavers through empowering and providing opportunities to care leavers to have their voice heard within the Council through a range of different activities, including through SpeakerBox (see Box 1) and through Young Inspectors who inspect housing for recent care leavers. Appendix 2 provides more details on the findings of these studies.

### **Box 1: Southwark Council's SpeakerBox**

SpeakerBox is a forum established in 2005 in Southwark for children and young people in care and care leavers. There are 3 groups: primary age (6-11), secondary age (12-16/18) and a care leavers group (16/18-21/25). The purpose of SpeakerBox is to provide children in care and care leavers with the opportunity to meet their peers, discuss their experiences of being in care and influence Southwark Council's practice. The groups run alongside a range of activities, consultations and projects that members are invited to participate in.

More information is available in Southwark Council's Local Offer available online here: <https://localoffer.southwark.gov.uk/have-your-say/forums/speakerbox/>

## **1.2 Project aims and intended outcomes**

### **Original aims and outcomes**

The project bid was jointly developed by Catch22 and Southwark Council. The bid identified various challenges for the service, including being hindered by unnecessary bureaucracy and the perceived rigidity of traditional statutory roles, alongside the use of agency staff to fill vacancies. These were seen as barriers to staff working flexibly and

intensively with care leavers to develop effective relationships and align support with identified needs.

Catch22 and Southwark Council aimed to:

1. Create a Care Leavers Trust, a new, jointly owned legal entity and Alternative Delivery Vehicle (ADV)
2. Establish a new staffing model and introduce an innovation culture, testing new roles and approaches to assessment, planning and measurement that are aspiration-focused and less bureaucratic
3. Co-design a flexible, needs-led service with care leavers, staff and partners and increase participation opportunities, expanding from peer mentors to include paid roles
4. Build stronger partnerships with young people, families, communities, providers, and businesses in Southwark to create social capital
5. Embed a culture of corporate parenting.

### **Box 2: What is an Alternative Delivery Vehicle (ADV)?**

Council services that are not delivered 'in-house' involve some form of alternative delivery vehicle (ADV) or model (ADM). This includes:

- Local Authority Trading Company (LATC)
- Public Service Mutual (PSM or mutual)
- outsourcing to an existing social enterprise or charity; or to a for-profit provider
- joint venture (JV) potentially involving ownership and control by a range of stakeholders including (but not limited to) staff, the council, or independent providers.

More information on ADMs can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/libraries-alternative-delivery-models-toolkit/alternative-delivery-models-explained>

The original bid set out plans to create the first Care Leavers Trust, a joint venture owned by Southwark Council and Catch22. It was expected that this would have enabled greater innovation in delivering services for care leavers. This involved co-design work with care leavers and using the power to innovate to establish a new transformative staffing model with a team around the person who can best provide the right support.



It was anticipated that the 27-month project would result in improved outcomes for care leavers, including: improving their accommodation, health, educational or employment, financial stability, family or community networks, and reducing risks like substance misuse and youth violence. Other outcomes included reduced crime and anti-social behaviour in the community, less demand on policing, health and justice systems, and a small reduction in the existing service cost.

## **Changes to intended aims and outcomes**

The plans set out in the original bid changed significantly early on. Following detailed discussions about the design principles and practicalities of creating a joint venture to deliver the care leaving service, Southwark Council and Catch22 recognised that more time was needed to explore the implications of the joint venture before proceeding. Although not originally planned in the bid, the project commissioned a scoping exercise conducted by Inner Circle Consulting in 2018 followed by a final options appraisal in summer 2019. Ultimately, the creation of the ADV (aim 1) was not taken forward due to its perceived risks to the service and practical, financial and technical challenges. This included concerns about the amount of time it would take to transition and adjust to a new organisation, which could have delayed outcomes for young people, and how it could affect relationships with other Council services, such as data sharing processes. It was also more complex legally and more expensive than some other options.

Consequently, the project team had to re-assess and re-focus delivery plans that would stay 'in-house'. Without the ADV, introducing the transformative staffing model (aim 2) was also redefined. Instead, recruitment focused on filling social worker and Personal Adviser vacancies alongside new posts to support the other aims of co-design and participation, social capital, and corporate parenting (aims 3-5). To improve the service without the ADV, a new aim involved piloting new approaches for the practice model, including the STAIRS pilot proposed in Spring 2018 (see Box 3). The STAIRS approach was discontinued in Spring 2019 due to challenges encountered by the pilot team in implementing the model. Section 3 provides more detail on how the project evolved and its impact on the service and Appendix 3 includes findings from the internal evaluation of the STAIRS pilot.

Ultimately, the project was still rooted in improving important outcomes for care leavers through its improvement of service provision. However, due to delays and limited time for new approaches to embed, it became increasingly unlikely that changes would be observable in the evaluation timeframe. This was especially because most project activities did not involve direct working with young people (excluding group-work, Unlock-It and ReConnect). It is reasonable to expect that changes made at the service level, such as introducing new posts and creating better links with other Council services, take

time to filter down and result in improvements for young people’s outcomes. As such, shorter-term outcomes were updated mid-2019 to reflect project delivery (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Updated short- and intermediate-term outcomes**

<b>Short-term outcomes</b>	
<b>System</b>	<b>Care leavers directly engaged by project</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More permanent staff, including specialist workers</li> <li>• Reduced caseloads for PAs and SWs</li> <li>• More partnership working within and outside the Council for example local businesses in Southwark</li> <li>• Better understanding of corporate parenting responsibilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Care leavers are aware of support available to them through appropriate communications, including the Local Offer, website and newsletters.</li> <li>• Care leavers feel involved in their pathway planning.</li> <li>• Care leavers involved in co-design and participation work feel listened to and involved in service re-design.</li> <li>• Care leavers involved in group-work have reduced social isolation, improved wellbeing and independent living skills.</li> <li>• Care leavers in the Unlock-It programme have improved EET opportunities.</li> <li>• Care leavers in the ReConnect programme have more and improved relationships with (extended) family.</li> </ul>
<b>Intermediate to long-term outcomes (unlikely to be evidenced in 2020 due to delays)</b>	
<b>System</b>	<b>All Southwark care leavers</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stable care leaver teams have:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased job satisfaction</li> <li>• Decreased staff sickness</li> <li>• Improved retention of staff</li> <li>• Decreased staff turnover</li> <li>• Less use of agency staff</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Reduced demand and cost of services</li> <li>• Reduced demand on policing, health and justice systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive transition to independence</li> <li>• Improved accommodation and a place to call home</li> <li>• Improved independent life skills (for example cooking)</li> <li>• Improved access to health support</li> <li>• Improved health and wellbeing</li> <li>• More young people in EET</li> <li>• Improved financial management and stability</li> <li>• Improved aspirations and optimism about future</li> <li>• Less risk-taking</li> </ul>

Source: Ipsos MORI, 2020.

### **Box 3: STAIRS framework (from Hare & Shostak, 2017)**

STAIRS is a way of thinking and working with people informed by psychological theory and evidence designed to be applied to social care contexts. Each letter of the acronym sets out a stage in the process for staff to assess a problem, choose an intervention, and then re-visit and revise this depending on the outcomes observed.

**S = Scoping** – Clarity representing problems, who the key players are in the child or young person's life and what change is wanted by whom

**T = Targets** – Going through a process of checking what is wanted by whom in order to agree what we're aiming for with as many people as possible, and an agreed way of tracking our progress

**A = Activators** – Collaboratively identifying the multi-level activators of the problems with reaching our targets

**I = Interventions** – Meaning anything anyone does, from the practical to the therapeutic, in order to impact on the activators

**R = Review and Revise** – Real-life monitoring of movement towards targets and modelling going back and revising formulations and plans – experimenting together

**S = Sustain** – Sustainability thought about from the outset in terms of types of interventions offered and plans for maintaining progress after closure – the bulk of the work!

## **1.3 Project activities**

As a new project in Round 2 of the Innovation Programme, the Care Leaver Partnership<sup>5</sup> (CLP) started in May 2017. The approach evolved significantly since. In addition to the options appraisal for the ADV, regular co-design and participation work, recruitment activity, and STAIRS pilot, further plans for project activities were agreed in early 2019. Key activities delivered included:

### **Improving the service:**

- Recruiting and embedding multi-disciplinary expertise through new 'Experienced Practitioners' with specialist knowledge and practice to increase expertise in the service and build capacity and skill among Personal Advisers (PAs)
- Reviewing the practice model and devising and implementing new staff training
- Raising awareness within the Council of corporate parenting responsibilities
- Identifying local opportunities, building partnerships and unlocking social capital

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<sup>5</sup> [https://cdn.catch-22.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/CLP\\_Mar19-PDF.pdf](https://cdn.catch-22.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/CLP_Mar19-PDF.pdf)

- Undertaking data analysis to provide recommendations to better support young people who are not in education, employment or training and those in custody and living out of borough
- Reviewing finance systems to improve ways of working for staff

#### **Improving direct work with young people:**

- Sending monthly CLP newsletters and updating the website<sup>6</sup> and paper Local Offer<sup>7</sup>
- Updating the pathway plan (including feasibility of a digital app option)
- Re-introducing group-work activities to reduce social isolation and improve skills
- Delivering the Unlock-It programme to support young people into education, employment or training
- Delivering the ReConnect programme to reengage with family and friend networks

Some planned activities were delayed or not taken forward following initial scoping, included: re-branding the service, evening and weekend activities, an out of hours service, an out of borough service, and assessing the feasibility of employing foster carers or other people from care leavers' networks as PAs. A summary of the project's theory of change, and how this evolved, can be found in Appendix 1.

The project finished on 31 March 2020 when Catch22's involvement ended. Plans are in place for Southwark Council to continue most but not all elements, discussed further in section 3.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://southwarkcareleavers.co.uk/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.southwark.gov.uk/childcare-and-parenting/children-s-social-care/the-local-offer-for-care-leavers>

## 2. Overview of the evaluation

### 2.1 Evaluation questions

Ipsos MORI was commissioned by the Department for Education to conduct an independent evaluation of the project. The evaluation plan, approved in December 2017, stated that the evaluation would end in August 2019, however, this was extended to March 2020 to align with delivery. The original evaluation questions were also revised to reflect project changes. The revised questions aimed to answer:

1. To what extent does the CLP address the key gaps in Southwark Council's provision of services for care leavers?
2. How successful is the CLP, including a comparison between the pilot team and other teams providing an enhanced service-as-usual, in improving outcomes for:
  - a. Frontline workers (for example job satisfaction, turnover, agency use)?
  - b. Care leavers (for example awareness of support, relationships with workers)?
3. What components of the CLP are most likely to be driving any changes in outcomes? How do these components compare with service-as-usual?
4. What external factors enable or hinder the success of the CLP?
5. What lessons are there for improving the CLP and wider roll out of the approach?
6. Do the benefits (in essence improved outcomes) outweigh the costs of the CLP compared with the cost-benefits of service as usual? What is the value for money (VfM)?

The second evaluation question was revised to align with the STAIRS pilot, in line with the evaluation methods to compare care leavers and staff in the pilot team with a comparison group of those from other care leaving teams. Due to the discontinuation of STAIRS, and because other project activities worked with new cohorts of young people, the evaluation was unable to conduct the intended comparisons. The implications for the evaluation methods are discussed below.

It is also important to note that due to project changes and delays, the evaluation and project teams agreed that significant changes in intermediate outcomes for care leavers, such as accommodation and education, employment or training, were unlikely to be observed within the evaluation's timeframe. The changes to the service provision will take time to embed though it is hoped by the project team that this will result in improved future outcomes. Southwark Council plans to monitor changes to care leaver outcomes

in-house. This responsibility will be distributed across the Experienced Practitioners, and through continued consultation with SpeakerBox, Southwark’s children in care forum.

## 2.2 Evaluation methods

The evaluation involved a mixed-methods design that collected data from a variety of audiences, including project delivery staff, senior stakeholders, frontline workers, and care leavers. Although the evaluation was intended to include both impact and process strands, the impact evaluation was compromised by project delivery changes (see limitations below). As the project evolved, the evaluation applied an iterative, “systems-focused” approach to assess how the CLP contributed to improving the complex system of care leaving services in Southwark. Details on the data collected between April 2018 and March 2020 are provided in Table 2.

Quantitative outcome data included online surveys with care leavers at 2 time points and analysis of aggregate statutory data on key measures for care leavers. Quantitative data were complemented by qualitative data collected through interviews and focus groups. In addition to gathering outcomes data, the qualitative data collection included an examination of what would have happened without the project and what worked well and less well in its delivery. Quantitative and qualitative data, along with data from a review of project documentation including internal evaluation reports, were triangulated to provide insights about how the CLP project contributed to the system in which it works, both in terms of improving outcomes and processes.

**Table 2: Summary of evaluation activities**

Activity	Purpose	Description
<b>Document review</b>	To understand project delivery and context and to inform development of research tools.	Ongoing throughout evaluation, with a final review of internal evaluation reports in February-March 2020. See Appendix 4 for document list.
<b>Consultation workshop with care leavers</b>	To explore best options for engaging young people with survey.	Completed in March 2018, involving 6 care leavers and the Catch22 Participation Officer.
<b>Theory of change workshop</b>	To revise the original ToCs <sup>8</sup> developed in 2017 given substantial project developments.	Completed in December 2018, involving project leads from Southwark Council and Catch22 as well as frontline workers from the STAIRS pilot team (11 participants). See Appendix 1 for ToC summaries.

<sup>8</sup> The project team developed a ToC as part of the project bid (with support from their Spring Coach) and revised this in August 2017.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Interviews with project leads and delivery staff in Southwark Council and Catch22</b>	To provide an overview of project progress, inform the theory of change, and understand lessons learned, barriers and facilitators.	A total of 15 interviews were conducted with 12 staff members: 8 between November 2018 and March 2019, and 7 in November and December 2019. Only 3 individuals were interviewed at multiple timepoints due to project and staff changes.
<b>Focus groups with STAIRS pilot team</b>	To understand staff experiences delivering the STAIRS pilot and to explore outcomes for staff (for example confidence, job satisfaction)	Completed in February 2019, involving frontline staff in the pilot team: 2 social workers and 2 personal advisers. Given the discontinuation of STAIRS, the follow-up focus group planned for early 2020 was not conducted.
<b>Interviews with care leavers</b>	To understand care leavers' experiences of engaging with Southwark Council plus any impacts on key outcomes (for example EET, health and wellbeing) and to assess change over time.	A total of 12 interviews with 11 young people were conducted, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 from the STAIRS pilot team in February 2019, and,</li> <li>• 7 involved in co-design, group-work and Unlock-It activities in February and March 2020<sup>9</sup>.</li> </ul> Only one young person was interviewed at both timepoints due to limited cohort overlap.
<b>Outcomes survey with care leavers</b>	To collect outcome measures for care leavers supported by the pilot team (intervention group) and other teams (comparison group) and assess change over time.	Wave 1 completed in December 2018. 49 surveys completed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 in pilot group<sup>10</sup></li> <li>• 27 in comparison group</li> <li>• 5 ineligible<sup>11</sup></li> <li>• 2 duplicate surveys</li> </ul> Wave 2 completed in February 2020 with 20 follow-up surveys completed. See Appendix 5 for survey questions.
<b>Secondary data analysis (i.e. SSDA903)</b>	To analyse key statutory measures on care leavers in Southwark over time.	Analysis of aggregated SSDA903 data conducted in February and March 2020. Individual-level SSDA903 data was not received.

Source: Ipsos MORI, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Several interviews planned for early March 2020 were cancelled in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>10</sup> This is based on those identified as being in the pilot team (care leaver team 1) in January 2019; however, in February 2019 a number of care leavers were moved to other teams, meaning the survey was completed by 9 young people still receiving support from the pilot team.

<sup>11</sup> It was not possible to identify these young people in Southwark's records.

## 2.3 Changes to evaluation methods

While the overarching methods remained consistent with the original evaluation plan, some elements were adapted when the STAIRS pilot started and ended. These changes, outlined below, were discussed with the project team and Opcit Research, and signed off by DfE.

**Comparison group:** The original evaluation plan involved identifying a comparison group from other local authorities because it was anticipated that the project would implement activities affecting all Southwark care leavers universally. When the STAIRS pilot was introduced in March 2018, the evaluation team amended the design to use a within-borough comparison group with non-pilot teams. However, this comparison approach was no longer feasible following the end of the STAIRS pilot in summer 2019. Most remaining activities were either universal (for example updates to the Local Offer and Pathway Plan) or with small cohorts for which baseline data was not available. Comparative analysis was thus limited to comparisons with statistical neighbours using aggregated statutory data.

**More qualitative research with project staff:** The evaluation plan proposed 1 interview or focus group with Southwark Council staff and 5 interviews with other local authorities to scope comparison group options, plus 5 interviews with project staff near the end of delivery. As the scoping exercise was no longer relevant, the evaluation included more qualitative research with project staff. This included 5 interviews in November 2018 and a focus group with the STAIRS pilot team in February 2019. Three additional interviews with project delivery staff took place in March 2019, and another 7 in November and December 2019.

**Interview with care leavers:** The evaluation team originally planned to conduct 15 interviews near the end of the evaluation period. Following the introduction of the STAIRS pilot, this was revised to 8 case studies among young people in the pilot team. This approach became inappropriate following the decision to stop STAIRS, thus remaining interviews targeted young people directly involved in other CLP activities, such as group-work.

**Increased survey incentive:** Following feedback from care leavers and staff in pre-survey workshops, we increased the incentive amount from £5 to £10 for the first survey and £20 for the second survey.

**Limited cost-benefit analysis:** The original project bid estimated that at the completion of the project, the ADV would deliver cost savings of £360,000 per year, with a total spend of £3.53m per year compared to the then-current costs of £3.89m. However, this was based on the ADV, which was not pursued, and following project completion, thus outside the scope of the evaluation timeframes. It was originally anticipated the



evaluation would include a cost benefit analysis to provide indicative evidence. However, this was found not to be feasible due to the lack of an appropriate comparison group and given the changing nature of the project.

## 2.4 Limitations of the evaluation

The evaluation has inevitable limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. These relate to project delivery changes and appropriateness of methods.

**Longer project design and development stages:** The bid aimed to explore the feasibility of a new concept (the ADV) but lacked a clear action plan. The planning took longer than expected given the complex nature of the project and context. This resulted in periods of ambiguity about activities and timings, as well as changes to planned activities throughout delivery. In response to this limitation, the evaluation team extended the evaluation to March 2020, revised the evaluation methods, and twice updated the project theory of change originally developed by the project in a workshop with Catch22 and Southwark Council staff.

**Variable reach of intervention and limited time to embed:** The project implemented multiple interventions to change service delivery, including several interventions with specific cohorts of young people. Most care leavers will not have benefited from these changes within the evaluation timeframe. For example, they may not have had a pathway planning meeting since the pathway plan was updated by the CLP because it was only introduced in late 2019. This could dilute effects and limit insights on potential impact. In response to this limitation, the evaluation team prioritised qualitative research with those involved in direct work. It is also important to emphasise that it is still too early to assess the impact of many project activities that have not yet embedded.

**Small sample sizes:** Both quantitative and qualitative findings are based on small sample sizes, particularly among care leavers who were directly involved in CLP activities, due to the changing nature of delivery. Methods included 8 interviews with 7 young people involved in co-design and group-work. Furthermore, there were multiple challenges to inviting all care leavers to the survey, though the weight given to this method was reduced due to the lack of a comparison group. The analysis avoids overstating conclusions based on small numbers and recognises the limitations of self-reported outcomes. The evaluation team conducted comparative analysis of statutory data at aggregate level using statistical neighbours; however, despite this offering large sample sizes, it also has limitations when comparing different local authority contexts.

**Attributing outcomes to the CLP:** The CLP is one of a range of activities taking place in Southwark Council that affect care leavers. This creates an attribution challenge for the evaluation. It is difficult to be sure whether any changes in outcomes observed among

care leavers are due to the CLP as opposed to exposure to a wider range of services and changes at Southwark Council (or both). Qualitative research gathered views from young people about what specific elements of the CLP made a difference for them and how.

**Inability to include individual-level SSDA903 data:** The evaluation team has not received individual-level SSDA903 data. Given small sample sizes and issues with quality of data, the evaluation team does not consider this a significant limitation. For example, ahead of 2019/20 data returns (unavailable at the time of evaluation reporting), data cannot inform an assessment of change over time since activities that took place in summer 2019.

## 2.5 Future evaluation

The continued delivery of project activities sits with Southwark Council who will also be responsible for future internal monitoring and evaluation. For example, Southwark Council reported that they are discussing plans with an external consultant to evaluate the Experienced Practitioner role. Findings from this evaluation, along with those from the multiple internal evaluations led by Catch22, can be used by the Council to support future delivery and evaluation. Knowledge shared by the evaluation team could also be used to inform future self-evaluation. For example, attendees at the ToC workshop reported it was a useful exercise that enabled them to better understand evaluation practice and objectives, and to create a shared view of the project's objectives. The survey developed for the evaluation could be an ongoing measure used by Southwark Council to assess outcome change over time.

## 3. Key findings

This section details the findings from the evaluation of the CLP project to answer the key (revised) evaluation questions specified in section 2. These findings relate to the relevance and effectiveness of the project's activities, which aimed to identify, understand and fill gaps in Southwark Council's provision for care leavers, with the longer-term aim of improving key outcomes for both staff and care leavers.

This chapter first focuses on findings associated with project activities that were aimed at changing systems and processes within the service (3.1) followed by findings that relate to project activities involving direct engagement with young people (3.2). Finally, the chapter sets out key considerations for assessing the project's sustainability (3.3) and value for money (3.4).

### 3.1. System-level processes and practice

#### Relevance and effectiveness of CLP activities aiming to change system processes and practices

When partnership working with Catch22 commenced in May 2017, senior stakeholders in Southwark Council were already committed to improving the Leaving Care service, following the Ofsted visit earlier that year. From this point, the CLP project set out designing and trialling new ways of working. At the service level, this included:

- exploring the feasibility of a jointly-owned ADV
- piloting new approaches for the practice model and pathway planning
- transforming the staffing model, including recruitment
- working closely within and outside the Council to raise awareness of corporate parenting responsibilities and 'unlock' social capital.

#### Exploring the feasibility of a jointly-owned ADV

One of the primary aims set out in the bid was the desire to create a more flexible service, co-designed by young people, that was "more meaningful and less bureaucratic". Southwark Council and Catch22 sought to achieve this through the development of a joint legal entity to deliver care leaving services. However, senior staff in interviews described many challenges in designing this. For example, it was noted that such a model in relation to leaving care did not exist elsewhere so the team did not have an example that could be adapted. Senior staff noted that this resulted in slow progress during the first year of the project until the team commissioned Inner Circle Consultants to conduct a baseline scoping report to inform the options appraisal for ADV decision-making, due to be completed at the end of 2018. The report recommended postponing

the options appraisal and regrettably, according to senior staff, the options appraisal was not concluded until Autumn 2019.

The options appraisal assessed the ADV against 3 other models of service delivery, including the current 'in house' model, and found the in-house model to be the best available option for the service. The assessment was based on desirability (how much various stakeholders wanted to do it), feasibility (the practicalities of setting it up) and viability (the longer-term financial position) for each option. It was reported that the in-house model was selected because it was less risky and complex than setting up a new stand-alone organisation, while still allowing improvement of delivery and outcomes.

As such, the joint venture was discounted due to its perceived risks to the service and practical, financial and technical challenges, which stand in contrast to the arguments put forward in the funding bid suggesting it would be feasible and beneficial. In addition to being more complex legally and more expensive than some other options, another key challenge related to concerns about the time it would take to bring together 2 established organisations with their own vision, values, and ways of working, and that this transition period would delay improving outcomes for young people. There were additional concerns that the joint venture could negatively affect the current relationships between the Leaving Care service and other Council services such as Housing, Adult Services, and Youth Offending teams. For example, it was unclear what impact the ADV would have on data sharing processes.

Retrospectively, senior staff members interviewed felt that the focus on the ADV had an overall negative effect on the project delivery. Firstly, before November 2018, work around the ADV took up a significant proportion of financial and time resource. Secondly, the final decision not to pursue an ADV was "helpful in easing [staff] anxiety", which helped improve the development of trust between the leaving care teams and Catch22. This is discussed further in section 3.1.3.

### **Piloting new practice models to support care leavers better**

The CLP project team started plans to pilot a new practice model in March 2018. They planned to adapt the STAIRS framework, which had been implemented successfully in Southwark's 'Keeping Families Together' team and Family Early Help service (Hare & Shostak, 2017). STAIRS was intended as "a framework for helping non-clinical staff work in a way that is more collaborative, analytic, goal-focused, very explicit target setting" (Pilot team staff). The pilot was designed so that one care leaving team started trialling the STAIRS approach from Summer 2018, with a view to rolling it out to all teams after the pilot.

In a focus group in early 2019, social workers and PAs in the pilot team described what was working well and less well about using STAIRS. For example, the approach helped

them engage in a more collaborative way and they benefited from sharing challenges and ideas during ‘multi-modal’ (multi-agency) group case supervision sessions where they discussed young people with more complex needs. They felt this helped avoid the feeling of isolation or ‘firefighting’ that can emerge if left to deal with a situation independently:

[The multi-modal groups] completely changed the way that I would approach working with that young person...it’s very refreshing for me to come into something where you are given the space to do that, and that the young person is given the space as well to try and find their feet. (Pilot team focus group)

Furthermore, pilot team members expressed the view that the new STAIRS-focused pathway plan could lead to positive engagement with care leavers and worked well for those with easily agreed goals. In these instances, staff felt the pathway plan empowered care leavers by better capturing their own personal narrative, rather than that of their PA.

However, the pilot team also experienced “teething problems” with the STAIRS pathway plan, viewing its expectations as too rigid and its format too long and overly complicated, especially for young people who were not interested in being actively engaged in the process. The STAIRS framework required working through a series of steps (see Box 3), which appeared to lengthen the pathway planning process. Some care leaving workers also found it difficult to apply the approach across different young people at different stages:

With the STAIRS pathway plan, it is much more directive: for you and the young person, ‘please scale where you are at with this and that and that’. And if the young person doesn’t want to talk to you about that, then do you continue ... or do you say ‘well actually I cannot do this yet because this young person is not engaged or in a position for us to talk about what scale out of 10 they rate their relationship with their family at the moment’? (Pilot team focus group)

Contextually, it is important to note that the pilot team experienced higher than usual staff turnover during this time, which meant the team had high caseloads and significant time-pressure. This made it more difficult to fully embed the approach because:

- STAIRS training sessions had to be delivered in repeated cycles so understanding across the pilot team was at different stages.
- Combined with high caseloads, staff felt the framework did not suit many young people so it was never universally applied across the pilot team’s caseload.

- Staff were unable to successfully employ the RAG ('red, amber, green') system which guided the type and intensity of interventions that social workers and PAs should assign to cases. The system was never fully implemented due to a lack of processes in place to engage multi-agency support for more complex, high risk (red) cases.
- Although staff often found the weekly general and multi-modal supervision sessions helpful, they felt it took too much time away from their casework, which led to inconsistent attendance.
- Written guidance for staff was poorly organised with "bits of photocopied paper".

Furthermore, the decision to trial STAIRS only within the pilot team was disruptive across the service. While the pilot team became frustrated with the added workload and training for STAIRS, the other teams felt neglected because the focus of senior leadership was on the pilot team. In addition, many staff members associated the pilot with Catch22 and it therefore "created a superficial division which didn't equate Catch22 and Southwark as one body, a separation which made Catch22 isolated from the service" (Senior staff).

Senior staff from the Council and Catch22 reflecting on the pilot in interviews noted that its implementation eventually "didn't seem valued, it turned into a slog" and thought it would have been better to focus resources across the service. They also recognised that more should have been done to inform staff about the CLP's decision to pilot STAIRS, including consulting with staff and assessing the service's readiness for change. Given that many staff members were already worried about the CLP's plans for the ADV, these consultations might have avoided some of the negative repercussions associated with the pilot.

Ultimately, decision-makers felt the challenges associated with implementing STAIRS overshadowed any potential benefits and it was discontinued in May 2019. Given that the intervention was never fully implemented, it was not appropriate to measure outcomes for care leavers in the pilot. The findings from the internal evaluation of STAIRS led by Catch22 are summarised in Appendix 3.

Following the end of the pilot, the CLP launched a revised pathway plan, based on lessons learnt from the STAIRS version. The CLP commissioned consultants to assess whether a digital pathway plan app would be a meaningful investment and decided not to pursue this further on the consultants' recommendation. Instead, the CLP devised a new training plan to upskill staff on the content of the pathway plan and how to use it with a focus on developing good relationships and having good conversations with young people. Assuming the pathway plan is successfully embedded, this should help address one of the issues raised by the 2017 Ofsted report that pathway planning needed greater consistency across care leavers.

The outcome of the STAIRS pilot raises a question about whether services should introduce new models of working or simply incorporate principles of known best practice in a structured way. Findings suggested that applying an entirely new model was met with resistance for the reasons set out above, but that some of the principles were still valuable and could be incorporated relatively easily into the existing way of working. Depending on the type of intervention and the context within which it is implemented, the findings here indicate that commissioners and local authorities should consider the appropriateness and feasibility of implementing new models, especially where they are likely to require significant adaptation to suit care leaving services.

### **Creating a stable and skilled service**

In 2019, the CLP team led a significant recruitment initiative for Southwark Council's Leaving Care service. The primary aim for recruitment was to create a more stable workforce by addressing issues associated with large caseloads, higher than usual staff turnover, and reliance on agency or locum staff. Catch22 and Southwark Council were able to scrutinise the current staffing model to understand its needs:

One of the key issues around service delivery has been staffing. The project enabled [the Council] to right-size the service, i.e. make sure there are the right numbers of staff in post to manage the allocations and capacity properly. Previously the team wasn't right-sized and relied on high numbers of locum staff. The project enabled us to review our staffing capacity and think about what the structure might look like. (Senior staff)

Projects receiving funding for finite timeframes often recruit fixed term positions and can face difficulties filling such posts. Senior staff emphasised that this would not be sustainable and could negatively impact both the service's culture and relational continuity between staff and young people. To promote the service's stability, the CLP recruited multiple permanent positions, including a new permanent service manager following the previous manager's departure, as well as some fixed term contracts.

A secondary aim was to create a more skilled workforce, which senior staff described as a response to the service's reliance on external agencies for issues such as education, employment or training, substance abuse, mental health and housing. The CLP designed a new role for specialist non-social workers who would support and upskill the team on specific issues, as well as hold smaller caseloads of young people. Six Experienced Practitioners were recruited, including a housing worker, education, employment or training worker, youth worker, young women's worker, substance abuse worker, and social capital manager. Senior staff felt these roles supported the CLP's vision for a more flexible service:

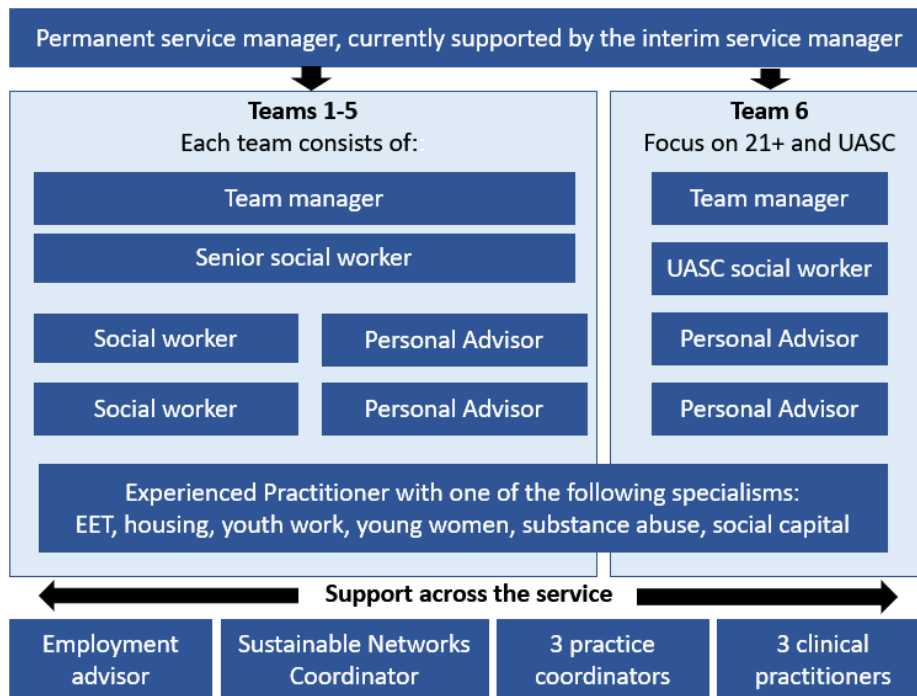
The benefit of [recruiting Experienced Practitioners] is bringing people in who probably aren't from a local authority and have different ways of doing things. Going forward, it's definitely going to give us more flexibility. (Senior staff)

Senior staff recognised that there were delays “getting the right people into those posts and for the full impact of those roles to be felt” with some Experienced Practitioners only coming into post in recent months. However, several Experienced Practitioners came into post earlier on and project leads reported in interviews that social workers and PAs were starting to see their added-value for supporting young people with complex needs, increasing both the “quality and frequency of interactions”. The CLP also recruited a Sustainable Networks Coordinator and co-opted members for the Corporate Parenting Committee and corporate parent mentors (see sections below).

Alongside recruitment, the Leaving Care service evolved. For example, in 2018, the service was extended to provide services to young people aged 16 to 25 in line with the latest legislation, a level of management was removed, and the service expanded from 4 to 5 teams, and then to 6 teams in 2019. Figure 1 below depicts the current staffing model.

Overall, according to interviewed senior staff, changes to the staffing model have had a positive impact on caseloads. At the end of 2019, it was estimated by a senior staff member interviewed that the average caseload for PAs had gone from over 30 to between 24 and 25.

**Figure 1: Southwark Council's Leaving Care team staffing model**



Source: Ipsos MORI, 2020.



## **Building networks and partnerships within and outside Southwark Council**

The CLP also led work to create more joined-up relationships across Council services, for example, housing, education, and health services. As one staff member explained,

You can't say 'I'm just working with Housing' because then Housing turns into 'But they need support with mental health or benefits'. You can't work in isolation...because it covers so many strands of somebody's life. (Senior staff)

The CLP aimed to raise awareness about corporate parenting responsibilities and increase the attendance of care leavers during meetings with different Council teams, where staff explained "who care leavers are, what it means to be a corporate parent, and what they can do to help". These corporate parenting activities asked teams across the Council whether what they provide for Southwark care leavers would be good enough for their own children, with events like Care Leavers Week being key platforms to raise awareness within the Council about their responsibilities and how they can support care leavers.

Some key outputs from this strand of work included:

- Reframing the terms of reference of the Corporate Parenting Committee to ensure that the voice of the young person is better heard, and making it more workshop-oriented. This new format has been used at the 2 most recent meetings that focused on Housing and Health. The CLP also co-opted members and invited young people to sit on the committee.
- Identifying corporate parenting mentors, which included colleagues from across the Council. These mentors are paired with a young person to provide additional support and increase care leavers' access to resources in the Council.

To build networks and partnerships outside Southwark Council, the Community Social Capital Manager was tasked with tapping into wider community resources and working closely with local organisations. By considering what opportunities were present within the community, for example, potential apprenticeships and internships, the CLP "mobilised the local community to offer care leavers education, employment or training opportunities not available before" (Project delivery staff). As part of the project, the CLP leveraged these new connections and launched the Unlock-It programme, which involved supporting a small cohort of young people into education, employment or training opportunities (see section 3.2).

## **Facilitators for CLP systems-wide activities**

Several facilitating factors supported the CLP's activities, as set out below.

- **Dedicated project lead:** It was evident that a project of this scale, which included multiple activity strands, required strong project management skills. In interviews, staff who were involved in the designing and delivery phases of the project from both Southwark Council and Catch22 highlighted how the project picked up significant momentum when the current project manager joined in December 2018.
- **Benefits of partnership working:** Despite some tensions between Catch22 and Southwark Council during the early stages of the project and more general challenges set out below, staff also noted the value of partnership working. Two key examples included recruitment and reviewing Southwark Council's finance procedures:

The flexibility of recruitment that Catch22 can bring is really helpful. In local authorities, it can be difficult to recruit quickly whereas organisations like Catch22 can recruit quickly and in an agile manner [as they are not bound by local authorities' slow and rigid recruitment processes]. (Senior staff)

...local authority systems are quite bureaucratic and difficult to change so someone else from an organisation that offers greater flexibility [is] helpful [in addressing issues that the authority has no in-house capacity to do so]. (Senior staff).

- **Data and research informing practice:** As part of the CLP's focus on participation work (see 3.2), a significant amount of consultation and research was conducted to inform the project's activities as well as recommendations for practice. For example, the Participation Coordinator conducted research on the needs of those who live out of borough (which is approximately half of Southwark's care leavers) and those in custody.
- **Internal evaluation and reflection:** The CLP actively employed self-evaluation to reflect on the lessons learnt through delivery. Given the challenges associated with the ADV and STAIRS pilot, these internal evaluations supported the CLP to take a formative and iterative approach to trialling new ways of working, in the absence of a clearly defined plan at the outset of the project.

## Barriers to systems change

Multiple barriers for the project were also identified in interviews and focus groups with staff members, ranging from decision-makers to practitioners. These barriers reflected the complexity of the system and the CLP project.

- **Overambitious plans for innovation:** The CLP encountered challenges introducing innovation (such as the ADV or STAIRS) for multiple reasons that could

potentially have been avoided by questioning whether the scale and wide-ranging nature of the innovation proposed by the CLP was realistic and feasible. A detailed assessment of context and potential impact on staff could have informed how the CLP addressed contextual barriers (such as high caseloads) as well as the challenges associated with innovation (for example, cultural change). Senior staff expressed in interviews that Southwark Council had the “desire to think innovatively” but were unsure whether they had the capacity and “headspace for innovation”, given the need to focus on day-to-day practice to improve their Ofsted rating and maintain support for young people. This created some challenges as there were 2 competing priorities, the focus on current practice and the focus on innovation. Shifting work cultures to try new ways of working takes time and can add pressure to staff already at full capacity. See Box 4 for further reflections.

- **Lack of parameters for the innovation:** While many other projects in the Innovation Programme delivered interventions with defined targets and boundaries as recommended by the first Round of the Innovation Programme, the CLP sought whole-system change for care leavers services, initially in the form of a joint delivery venture, which had not been done before. The lack of clear parameters for the innovation contributed to significant delays, with some activities not starting until the final year of funding, and changes to project delivery. Reflecting on the project near the end of evaluation, one staff member stated:

This project was very different [from other Innovation Programme projects] because it was the kernel of a seed of an idea ... that actually nobody had figured out how to achieve this massive thing that was in the bid. It hadn't been done anywhere in the country ever before. [It is important] to acknowledge that these things do take time to work out and of course they don't always work. (Senior staff)

This is not a clear-cut project. It's not 'we're running this for one year and we need X young people and then we will evaluate it at the end. This is a constantly ongoing project, so it's not going to end ... The momentum has built up over the past year ... and that's created buy-in and appetite to do more ... the Council will need to take that forward. (Senior staff)

- **Staff changes:** In addition to challenges with the turnover of social workers and PAs, both Southwark Council and Catch22 had leadership changes during project delivery, including the original CLP project manager leaving in mid-2018 and a replacement joining in late 2018. This affected the momentum and direction of the CLP project, and changes within the Council were perceived by some project staff to cause disruption in the wider service for some periods of time:

This has affected communications and clarity of vision and values. Each person's working style is different ... the change in leadership

affects morale, working practices, how teams function and collaborate with each other. (Senior staff)

- **Challenges of partnership working:** Multiple challenges for partnership working between Catch22 and Southwark Council were evident. For example, the nuances of the perceived aims and objectives of the project seemed to vary between partners, and tensions arose between Catch22 and Southwark Council from uncertainty associated with the ADV followed by divisions created from the STAIRS pilot. Furthermore, staff noted that the 2 types of organisations had different cultures and ways of working, and this appeared to become a weakness rather than a strength for the project.
- **Disrupted communications:** As mentioned above, information is a mediating factor affecting resistance to change. In the context of project and leadership changes, staff felt the aims of the CLP were unclear and that decisions were made only at senior levels:

I'm not sure we were part of producing a vision, so I'm not entirely sure what the vision is! (Pilot team staff)

There's a bit of a sense that these were decisions going on at a fairly high level and the team weren't particularly party to until really quite late in the whole process...there's a bit of a top-down rather than bottom-up feeling...a bit done unto...it's made it difficult to really get behind it, at least initially a bit of resistance. (Project delivery staff)

The CLP introduced newsletters about the project though these had limited success in terms of increasing knowledge and understanding of the project. However, this improved over time as staff in Southwark Council were able to see tangible outputs of the CLP and understand their value. This encouraged more staff communication and collaboration.

...the door has been opened more in terms of Catch22 being able to attend team meetings and share what is being done. This increases the visibility of what Catch22 are doing and get more inputs from staff. (Senior staff)

- **Challenging external factors:** The CLP required changes in the working culture for social workers and PAs to embrace new ways of working. While this was taking place, policy changes (including extending support to care leavers up to the age of 25) and demographic changes in the care leaver population (especially an increase in refugee and migrant young people seeking support) posed additional challenges to the Leaving Care team. This meant that the time and capacity had to be diverted from the project to support these additional duties.

#### **Box 4: Setting realistic expectations for (time-limited) innovation projects**

**Is a service ready for innovation?** Disruption due to high levels of staff changes and use of locum staff, in conjunction with a 'requires improvement' Ofsted rating for the leaving care service, meant that the project occurred during a challenging time for Southwark Council. Similar system-change initiatives relating to children's services have been found to work less well in environments that are already disrupted.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, key staff within Catch22 with experience in statutory services left soon after the project began. These circumstances should be considered when introducing innovation, to determine an appropriate scale of delivery and expected outcomes for the service.

**Is the innovation ready for the service?** The combination of the factors above appeared to contribute to the slow start of the project and its lack of a coherent delivery plan and theory of change. With the proposed innovation not clearly defined, there were challenges for effectively communicating about it to staff who would be affected. From organisational change literature, we know that information, participation and trust in management are mediating factors in employees' resistance to change (van Dam et al., 2008). By considering organisational change literature, involving staff in the process, developing a clear delivery plan, and monitoring a risk register developed at the outset of the project to mitigate risks, the leadership team may have been able to anticipate and divert the ensuing barriers to change.

**Should funders become involved?** Project funders should also consider taking a more active role in agreeing milestones, and clearly communicating the consequences of not fully or partially meeting them. If project parameters change to the extent that an impact evaluation reaching Level 3 or above on the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale<sup>13</sup> is no longer feasible, funders ought to consider whether the project and evaluation are fruitful investments to continue.

## **3.2 Provision for young people**

### **Relevance and effectiveness of CLP activities aiming to trial new ways of engaging with young people**

According to the original bid, the project aimed to improve outcomes for care leavers by improving system-level and staff-level outcomes that would improve support for young

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<sup>12</sup> Such as the Troubled Families Programme, establishing multi-agency working within local authorities: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-evaluation-of-the-troubled-families-programme-2015-to-2020-findings>

<sup>13</sup> Sherman et al (1997) developed a 5-point scale called the Maryland Scientific Method Scale (SMS) to evaluate the methodological quality of studies.

people. Regarding direct engagement with young people, the bid emphasised that young people would be engaged to co-design services and this work was led by the Participation Coordinator throughout the project. As the project developed further, additional activities were introduced, including:

- Raising awareness of support by updating the website and paper Local Offer
- Re-introducing group-work activities to reduce social isolation and improve skills
- Delivering the Unlock-It programme to support young people into education, employment or training
- Delivering the ReConnect programme on re-engaging with family and friend networks

### **Co-designing services with young people**

A core objective of the CLP was to involve care leavers in the design and delivery of the service. To do this, the CLP Participation Officer began by consulting care leavers to understand their views and experiences of services and attending monthly SpeakerBox meetings. SpeakerBox is a forum for Southwark children and young people in care and care leavers, run by the Children's Rights Officer. The Participation Coordinator also set up a WhatsApp group for young people who were most interested in being involved in the CLP. Key examples of ways in which the CLP has engaged young people in the service include:

- Inviting young people to be part of the interviewing process for any new recruitment.
- Inviting young people to speak at events or attend a corporate parenting roadshow where opportunities were available.
- Planning to incorporate videos on the website to be more accessible to young people, based on their feedback.
- Consulting young people about rebranding the service, which on their advice did not go ahead.
- Researching the characteristics and needs of particular groups, including those living out of borough and in custody.
- Hosting various events including a 'you said, we did' event, Care Leavers Week and Care Leavers Awards.

There is evidence that this work influenced the activities of the CLP. For example, care leavers called for the reintroduction of group-work, a care leaver youth group, after it ended when a previous youth worker left Southwark Council. The Participation Coordinator highlighted that care leavers wanted an opportunity to socialise with other care leavers and the opportunity to do activities together. This work is discussed below.

SpeakerBox has also grown under the CLP, with care leavers describing it as more productive and with a greater circle of influence. In interviews, both staff and care leavers recognised that it had developed into a more effective platform where care leavers could engage with the service leadership and the Council more widely. One care leaver felt this was a marked change compared with before the CLP: “People seem to care what we have to say now, which is refreshing” (Care leaver).

Despite this influence, interviews with care leavers demonstrated vast differences in the knowledge and understanding of the CLP. While some admitted to having heard of the partnership but were not sure what it did, others appeared to have much greater knowledge of the partnership and believed it was good for the service:

I think it's a good idea but I'm not 100% sure what it's meant to do. I mean that they talk about rebranding it, and changing how it sounds, but ... I'm not 100% sure what it does or what it's going to do. I just know it exists. (Care leaver)

I think it is aiming to help young people get a voice... [Care leavers] will have a lot to say about social services and what they are doing wrong and what they're doing right. It's good for them to open up because some young people are very scared to open up. (Care leaver)

Following research on national best practice, the CLP provided recommendations in 2019 on how to shape service design in the future for young people in prison or out of borough, for example, what the offer should look like. With nearly half of all Southwark care leavers living outside of the borough and young people in custody being “one of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups” (Senior staff), the CLP team emphasised the importance of improving the service's understanding of these groups and how best to support them. To date, these recommendations have not resulted in changes to service delivery.

### **Raising awareness of available support**

The CLP also sought to raise awareness of available support among care leavers. Among the young people interviewed, there was very little awareness of how the service was changing, apart from knowing about the individual pieces of direct work they were involved in personally. For example, the ‘Local Offer’ was updated, with communication to young people via mail and email. However, interviews near the end of the evaluation suggest knowledge of this was generally low, particularly among those less engaged:

I don't really have much understanding ... as I said I never really read the emails and [if] my PA mentioned anything about care leavers or

Social Services I would be like 'I don't care, I don't want to know'.  
(Care leaver)

The CLP also sent monthly newsletters about available support, though these depend on having accurate email addresses, which are often changing, and young people in interviews did not recall receiving these. This may mean that the website, which was updated and launched in 2019, has also been underutilised. It is therefore recommended that Southwark Council investigates this further.

Some young people in interviews suggested that communications might reach more young people via social media channels. This stood in contrast to the recommendations of a communications consultant brought in by the CLP to provide insights on the best channels to use with young people, including potential plans to digitalise pathway planning through a mobile app. The consultant spoke with young people, stakeholders in the leaving care service, external organisations who either offered new apps or digital solutions, and other local authorities or organisations who had trialled some digital products, and also tested branding options with young people. The results of this process suggested that young people were not interested in accessing leaving care services digitally.

### **Increasing social interaction and reducing loneliness**

As part of the CLP, group-work was reintroduced, aimed at reducing isolation. Group-work included targeted and non-targeted sessions, which were both positively received. The non-targeted sessions focused on the social element, giving care leavers the opportunity to do various activities<sup>14</sup> with their peers. Targeted sessions focused on life skills, wellbeing and services within the Council, all relevant to young people. One care leaver discussed a series of sessions on mindfulness, which they felt gave care leavers in Southwark the opportunity to express themselves in a way which they otherwise would not. Group-work was voluntary, meaning the group-work practitioner invited a large group of young people who then attended depending on their interest in the activity and their availability. The group of care leavers invited were often linked to SpeakerBox or had previously attended group-work sessions, so the invitation (usually through WhatsApp) did not reach many young people. In interviews, young people emphasised that they wanted to see more young people getting involved in these activities.

Among those interviewed, young people provided positive feedback about group-work activities. A key aspect that they valued was the social element, and many suggested they had become like a 'family' and a support network for one another. For one care leaver, group-work reconnected them with another care leaver who they met many years

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<sup>14</sup> Some activities which group-work have ran include: going to the cinema, ice skating, rock climbing, and go karting. These take place alongside other informal activities, such as a drop-in and casual meet ups.



ago in care but had lost touch with. When asked to summarise the impact that group-work had on them, one care leaver said:

[It brings you closer] with people who are similar to you...when we are all together as care leavers, we can talk about being a care leaver as a group and it's not touchy or anything. (Care leaver)

The group-work practitioner developed meaningful relationships with care leavers who attended, and young people interviewed described this as being key to their decision to continue attending. This was said to be due to their personable and laidback approach, contrasting with young people's perceptions of other staff in the Council: "Sometimes I forget [s]he's a professional" (Care leaver). For some care leavers, the group-work practitioner had become their go-to person instead of their PA. This was because some care leavers felt that the group-work practitioner was more reliable and responsive when they needed someone, and they had developed more trust than with their PA.

Overall, young people clearly articulated that they enjoyed the sessions and would want these to continue on a regular basis. For many, these social interactions helped young people "get out of the house" (care leaver), have opportunities they would not have otherwise, and try new things.

### **Supporting young people into education, employment or training through the 'Unlock-It' programme**

The Unlock-It programme was a 5-week personal development programme aimed at care leavers not in education, employment or training. The course ran from July to August 2019, during which time 10 care leavers enrolled (from 50 referrals from social workers and PAs) and completed the course. The programme was the main work of the Community Social Capital Manager.

Compared with other CLP activity strands, the Unlock-It programme worked directly with young people to focus on improving outcomes in the short-term:

We had 10 people that came on the programme, 7 people got into unique places [of work] ... 1 is actually working for [a senior official at the Council], this is someone who has never had a job before. (Project delivery staff)

Unlock-It focused on helping care leavers realise their potential through life skills sessions, networking, confidence building and employment skills – with a week of work experience at a partner organisation for each care leaver on the course. It sought to encourage care leavers by improving their employment opportunities and social connections and removing their self-perception that, because they are a care leaver, they are limited in what they can do and aim for. For example, one young person on the

programme reflected that “[their current opportunity] was never in my prospects 9 month ago.”

This experience is enhanced through the week of work experience, where young people would enter a corporate environment and meet people they would otherwise be unlikely meet and interact with:

[It has] put me on a track for greater things that I would have been otherwise... I can envision myself being still in [my previous job] thinking ‘this is the way I have to live’... Being on the programme has made me see my future doesn’t have to be decided by the past or the narrow vision I had of [my future]. (Care leaver)

Although the evaluation collected some evidence suggesting that young people achieved positive outcomes, such as entering employment, this was based on a small number of interviews with staff and young people and it is not possible to predict whether these changes will be sustainable or result in positive longer-term outcomes.

To provide ongoing support, young people are meant to continue meeting with their mentor to discuss and support their goals. While no formal plans to run the programme again currently exist, the internal self-evaluation carried out by the programme coordinator recommended that the programme be repeated at quarterly intervals.

### **Support re-engagement with social networks in the ‘ReConnect’ programme**

The ReConnect programme, led by the Sustainable Networks Coordinator, was designed to help young people re-engage with their family and friend networks. An assessment of this programme is out of scope for the evaluation due to its launch in late 2019. This was delayed because it took longer than anticipated to receive appropriate referrals from team managers and staff. Senior staff believed this to be associated with challenges communicating the purpose of the activity:

Sometimes [staff] don’t engage initially because they’re not entirely sure what it is...these are new projects, people can’t touch and feel and see it...[after seeing the positive impact the programme can have], they say ‘oh, that was really good. Now I’m ready to tell you who I’ve got, who I think would benefit.’ (Senior staff)

### **Outcomes for Southwark care leavers**

Given the changes to delivery, it was no longer feasible to compare the outcomes of young people in the pilot team with those in other teams. Furthermore, given many activities were only implemented in the past year, it is too early to assess the impact of the CLP on outcomes for care leavers. However, as reference, Table 3 below shows how

key measures have changed over the past 3 years. Outcomes relating to education, employment or training appear to be improving, with 59% of Southwark care leavers in education, employment or training, compared with the national average (52%) and statistical neighbours (50%). Furthermore, data from the Council for 2019/20 show this has increased to 62%, suggesting continued improvement. However, these differences are small and they cannot be attributed directly to the CLP. Year on year cohorts might also vary.

The results of the before-and-after survey also did not show significant changes in outcomes during the project timeframe.

**Table 3: OC3 data returns for care leavers aged 19-21 in Southwark Council (DfE, 2020a)<sup>15</sup>**

	<b>2017 (Southwark)</b>	<b>2018 (Southwark)</b>	<b>2019 Southwark</b>	<b>2019 National</b>	<b>2019 Statistical neighbours</b>
Care leavers aged 19-21 years old (base)	270	286	280	NA	NA
Local authority not in touch	-	8%	9%	7%	8%
In suitable accommodation	80%	83%	82%	85%	84%
In any education, employment or training (EET)	49%	57%	59%	52%	55%
In higher education	6%	8%	8%	6%	9%
Not in education, employment or training (NEET)	39%	34%	31%	39%	35%

Source: Ipsos MORI, 2020

## Facilitators for engaging young people in the CLP

The key facilitating factors that supported activities with young people included:

<sup>15</sup> Please note that percentages under 10% should be viewed with caution as they refer to small sample sizes.

- **Established networks and forums:** SpeakerBox offered a direct route into speaking with and hearing from a group of young people already engaged and interested in improving the system.
- **Getting the ‘right’ staff:** In interviews, young people described close, trusting relationships with CLP staff, suggesting this was an important driver for their involvement in the project’s activities. Young people described these staff as being easy to talk to, relaxed, funny, and young enough to understand their circumstances.
- **Referral process and tailoring support:** Although the referral processes often took longer than expected, staff felt that they reached the ‘right’ young people to benefit from the programmes.

## Barriers for direct work with young people

The key barriers for working directly with young people have been:

- **Challenges reaching and engaging a wider audience:** Both staff and care leavers recognised that the co-design and participation work was often limited to the same pool of young people. Therefore, it is likely that not all views and experiences were heard, though this was somewhat mitigated by specific research for those who are not in education, employment or training, out of borough and in custody. However, staff recognised that it was never feasible to engage everyone:
 

Going from working with the pilot team to suddenly going to the whole service – we were never going to be able to engage everybody. I would definitely say that [the group of young people] is concentrated, but that’s not through lack of trying. (Senior staff).
- **Difficulties communicating changes:** In some cases, particularly early on when the design of the CLP was still under review, young people who were engaged in co-designing the service felt their input was not resulting in changes: “We’re not seeing anything changing, all we hear is ‘we’re working on it, we’re working on it.’” Staff felt it was difficult to communicate how they were making changes to the service “because a lot of it is behind the scenes”.

## 3.3. Sustainability

Given that the project aimed to make improvements to the wider system, the CLP project was in a better position to make decisions with sustainability in mind compared with some projects that ‘parachute in’ interventions where there are no long-term plans to continue its delivery. In addition, the CLP continuously reflected on what worked well and

less well to inform long-term plans: “We’ve been talking about sustainability the whole way through this project and what happens afterwards” (Senior staff).

Some of the activities are already set up to be sustainable. For example, Experienced Practitioners are in permanent posts to support the current staffing model. In addition, the website mainly provides information unlikely to change frequently, requiring minimal maintenance from Southwark Council. There are also plans in place for Southwark Council to take forward strands of work, including:

- One of the Experienced Practitioners will take over responsibilities for the community social capital and mentoring work.
- The Experienced Practitioners specialising in education, employment or training will continue the work started by the project.
- Participation work will continue through the Children’s Rights Officer and Sustainable Networks Officer, both based in the Council.
- There is commitment to appoint a staff member who is responsible for keeping up the momentum on corporate parenting responsibilities.
- If the ReConnect programme is successful, it may continue within the Family Group Conferencing or Lifelong Links team.

However, the evaluation is unable to assess whether sustained delivery will result in improved outcomes that are also sustainable.

### **3.4. Value for money**

The costs associated with the project may be off-set by potential costs avoided as a result of the project. These costs may relate to system-level outcomes, including changes in wider organisational functions that are attributable to the CLP, staff-level outcomes (such as reduced turnover) or outcomes for care leavers, which relate to the impact of improvements introduced by the CLP.

Given the substantial number of changes to the project, it is too early to determine the impact of CLP activities introduced within the last year. As such, assessing the project’s value for money would be unwise and any analysis of costs at this stage would be highly speculative.

Qualitatively, staff noted that they sought value for money by commissioning options appraisals and quotes to understand whether activities were worth the investment; however, staff also recognised that a large amount of resource went into both the ADV and STAIRS pilot, with neither one resulting in clear outcomes that offset the costs.

Regarding the Leaving Care services workforce, there was a higher than usual staff turnover during the project, which required additional recruitment time and costs to fill posts. Furthermore, according to staff interviews, this impacted the morale and job satisfaction of remaining staff. As such, costs may have increased during the project's timeframe. However, the CLP recruited multiple permanent staff members, who were in place at the end of the project. At present, it is not known whether these posts will result in more stability for the team in the longer-term and whether this will off-set costs of future turnover or use of agency staff.

## 4. Summary of key findings on 7 practice features and 7 outcomes

As reported in the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme Round 1 Final Evaluation Report (Sebba et al., 2017), evidence from the first round of the Innovation Programme led the DfE to identify 7 features of practice and 7 outcomes to explore further in subsequent rounds.

### 4.1 Practice features

The findings related to 5 practice features outlined below. Evidence on whether they are being successfully implemented is limited due to insufficient time since associated activities were introduced and changes in project activities.

**Strengths-based practice frameworks:** The CLP trialled the STAIRS framework with a pilot team in 2018-19 with the intention of improving the quality of relationships between staff and young people, upskilling staff, and empowering young people to take more ownership of achieving their personal goals. Although STAIRS was discontinued, the internal evaluation of the pilot noted that some of the core principles of the framework would remain important for the service, which align with this practice feature:

For example, emphasising the critical importance of the relationship between the young person and their key worker, reinforcing the importance of the principle of 'working with' rather than 'doing to' and having shared goals, using the tools and process to focus on empowerment of care leavers in resolving their issues, and taking the time to problem solve together. (STAIRS internal evaluation report)

In interviews, senior staff explained that these principles have been incorporated into the revised pathway plan launched in late 2019 and the associated training for staff on building good relationships and "having good conversations" with young people. It is too early to assess whether these principles have resulted in changes in relationships with young people.

**Multi-disciplinary skill sets:** First, the project included expertise from both Southwark Council and Catch22. Second, the project involved building networks with services across the Council, including clinicians and the BeYou team who received CLP funding to work with vulnerable young women for 10 months. Third, the recruitment of Experienced Practitioners brought different backgrounds and specialisms to the service. Co-location was also consistently used, with Catch22 staff frequently working between Southwark Council offices, Talfourd Place (where PAs and social workers are based) and Catch22 offices.

**Family focus:** This practice feature was not a key focus for the CLP project though a small number of activities are relevant. For example, the ReConnect programme, which was out of scope for this evaluation, involves working directly with a small cohort of young people and their families and friends to establish sustainable networks. BeYou also supported young women, which included mothers and their families. Given this limited focus, this practice feature was not examined by the evaluation.

**High intensity and consistency of practitioner:** Statutory requirements for care leavers are more light-touch compared to those for looked after children. However, this practice feature is relevant for young people who struggle more than others with the transition to adulthood and may be at higher risk of negative outcomes. Social workers and PAs highlighted that complex cases can be time-consuming, meaning they have less time for other young people they support. The recruitment of Experienced Practitioners could support this practice feature, given their ability to reduce burden on social workers and PAs by providing specialist support to young people with complex circumstances. This allows social workers and PAs to maintain the case, ensuring consistency for the young person, while also offering a higher intensity of support where needed. However, given that Experienced Practitioners are still becoming embedded within the teams, it is too early to assess whether this practice feature will become standard. Furthermore, the CLP also recruited several other permanent members of staff to support the Council's aim to develop a more stable workforce.

**Skilled direct work:** The key barriers preventing this practice feature were staff turnover and high caseloads for an extended period during the CLP project. This meant social workers and PAs were often under time pressure, especially those with complex cases. As above, it is anticipated that the introduction of Experienced Practitioners will support teams to do more skilled direct work, and staff training is also planned to support the principles taken from the STAIRS pilot.

## 4.2 Outcomes

The outcomes for young people that are relevant to the CLP project include: reducing risk for young people; creating greater stability for young people; and increasing wellbeing for young people. However, these are longer-term aims for the project, which are intended to appear when service-wide changes are embedded and overall practice improves. That said, a few small cohorts of young people, who were engaged directly through the Unlock-It programme or group-work, reported relevant outcomes, including better employment opportunities, which supports their stability and reduces risks associated with unemployment such as financial difficulties, as well as building confidence, getting out of the house more and reducing loneliness, which supports their overall wellbeing.



Increasing workforce wellbeing and increasing workforce stability were staff-related outcomes relevant to the CLP project. During the project timeframe, multiple staff members left, including a service manager. While it was not believed that the CLP influenced their decisions to leave, this turnover had implications across the service, including increased caseloads. This negatively impacted staff morale, especially alongside leadership change, which consequently created challenges for implementing innovation. Staff remained concerned about whether an ADV was still a possibility and felt that the CLP's focus on improving outcomes suggested their hard work was not being recognised. However, during the project's final year, a key focus for the CLP was recruitment at all levels, including permanent PAs, social workers, senior social workers, a new service manager, and Experienced Practitioners. This reflects one of the key aims for the CLP to improve service stability. It is too early to say whether this will result in stability over time but senior staff members emphasised that it was an important step for the service in the hope that this will improve staff wellbeing, reduce the use of agency staff, increase relational continuity between staff and young people, and ultimately improve outcomes for care leavers.

## 5. Lessons and implications

There are lessons to be learned about the service-readiness, set-up, and delivery of the project that can inform future projects.

### Planning whole-system innovation

Several service-level, legislative and contextual factors meant that the CLP project posed an additional disruption in a complex environment. A few months prior to the project starting in May 2017, Southwark Council's 'experience and progress of care leavers' received an Ofsted rating of 'requires improvement'. In early 2018, legislation to extend PA support for care leavers up to the age of 25 came into place. In addition, Southwark Council experienced an increase in migrant and refugee young people requiring additional support from children's services. Evaluations of service changes in children's social care, for example the Troubled Families Programme evaluation, have shown that successful innovation (on a large scale) and partnership working requires a settled environment to flourish. The project was further challenged by a lack of a clear delivery plan and Theory of Change agreed by stakeholders early on, which affected delivery timescales and its ability to achieve the intended outcomes within the timescales.

**Recommendation 1:** Commissioners and local authorities should consider the feasibility of service-wide innovation that are in early planning stages to ensure they are realistic and not overambitious for the timeframes. If it requires further development, milestones for project activities as well as outcomes with associated (short, medium and long-term) timeframes should be agreed through the development of the project's Theory of Change.

### Anticipating impacts on staff

Recruiting to fixed-term positions is challenging in many types of services, including children's social care. These types of positions present risks for the stability of the service because staff may leave for permanent contracts elsewhere at any point. Where a grant-funded innovation project is being delivered, staff leaving can significantly delay delivery and affect the project's sustainability. Catch22 and Southwark Council recruited a mixture of fixed-term and permanent contracts to build sustainability into the project. However, due to a higher turnover of staff than usual and staff changes (including social workers and PAs, plus the project lead in Catch22), it was necessary to continue recruitment throughout the project, using senior management time, while frontline staff also experienced high caseloads and low morale. Where staff were recruited late in delivery, it was unlikely their impact could be observed within the project's timeframe.

During the project's first year, decisions were weighed up whether to implement change at a whole-service level, or to conduct a pilot before service-wide roll-out. The pilot approach was selected to trial STAIRS in one team, but this affected the wider service. Senior managers recognised that the pilot team felt negatively impacted by additional workload and practice change (while other teams were "allowed" to carry on as usual), which created divisions in the service. More generally, pilot and project staff in interviews reported not always feeling well-informed about changes and their impact. Although the senior management team felt strongly about taking staff 'on the journey', it proved difficult to communicate ongoing changes and new activities being introduced with staff already under time pressure. Senior managers recognised that more time and energy would have needed to be spent on change management, and in hindsight felt more consideration should have been given to the option of engaging external change management experts.

**Recommendation 2:** Completing a risk assessment and plan for staff changes should be developed at the outset. Where projects aim to make service-wide changes, sufficient lead-in time should be built in to recruit staff, develop and embed new processes, and initiate cultural change among staff. To free up time to support the innovation, senior managers could consider co-opting council operational expertise or encourage secondments both to innovation project management and delivery teams, and where appropriate, project leads could consider whether working with external change management experts would be worthwhile.

If there are plans to pilot an approach with a specific team or division, clear communications are needed with both pilot staff and wider service staff, offering clear explanations about how the pilot will affect both groups and the expected benefits (based on the Theory of Change).

## Partnership working

Bearing in mind Ofsted had recently rated the leaving care service as 'requiring improvement', both leaving care workers and senior managers noted that staff morale dipped at the start of the CLP project. The plan to set up an ADV created nervousness and uncertainty about how staff might be working in the future, and as noted above, the STAIRS pilot also introduced challenges. As these activities were linked to Catch22, tensions between the leaving care service and Catch22 were evident early on and exacerbated by staff not feeling involved in the vision for the CLP. Over time, with increasing communication about the activities being delivered, staff changes and the decision to not go ahead with the ADV, tensions eased and positive working relationships were developed. However, despite efforts to communicate about the CLP, some staff remained disconnected.

**Recommendation 3:** Senior managers should consider staff sensitivities before engaging an external organisation to co-lead change. Consult staff early on and assess the benefits of working with a partner as opposed to in-house delivery (through additional funding). Benefits should outweigh potential tension and disruption.

Where partnerships are formed, ensure that the key roles and responsibilities are clear from the outset, for example, whether certain strands are led by one partner or the other, and who is responsible in each organisation for cascading information down to the wider teams.

## Managing multiple project changes

Many decisions were yet to be taken about the project design and its implementation nearly a year into delivery while options were assessed. Similarly, there were significant design changes during the second year of the project. The proposed ADV, around which the funding bid was based, did not go ahead, and the STAIRS pilot was discontinued after approximately one year. The lack of a clearly defined delivery plan and Theory of Change to follow led to disruptions for the project and wider service.

**Recommendation 4:** If planned activities change during delivery, detailed consideration ought to be given to how the changes will affect intended outcomes for the service, staff and young people, particularly in the specified timeframes. This should be guided by the project's Theory of Change. If there are wider challenges and unexpected pressure on services, commissioners and project leads should also consider whether pursuing innovative interventions is feasible and beneficial in the timeframes.

## Keeping young people engaged

Following the end of the STAIRS pilot, the CLP project involved non-targeted activities – for example, the 'local offer' was sent to all care leavers, the website re-designed and monthly newsletters sent to care leavers. As a core strand for the CLP, participation activities supported young people to join discussions and ensure their voices are present 'in the room'. The CLP also developed strong relations with SpeakerBox, Southwark's children in care council. Some young people in interviews highlighted that they felt more opportunities were available to feed into service design than previously. However, the vast majority of young people had little to no understanding of the role and purpose of the CLP and it was evident that the CLP engaged with a core group of young people, suggesting its limited reach.

**Recommendation 5:** Project leads should build in co-design and youth participation opportunities from the outset to ensure that young people's voices are heard, for example, in the development of the project's delivery plan and Theory of Change. This could be enhanced by setting out clear objectives so that young people have a better understanding of how their views will inform the project approach. This should also include feedback loops. Project leads should also consider how to reach and engage a wide audience of care leavers in both co-production and targeted interventions. For instance, they could explore using social media platforms to highlight opportunities and services.

## Unlocking social capital within and outside Southwark Council

The CLP successfully established new links to unlock social capital. This included building awareness of corporate parenting responsibilities within the Council and establishing closer relations with housing, health and clinical services. It also involved building a network of local partners and businesses within Southwark who could offer high-quality opportunities for care leavers, for example, volunteering or paid internships and apprenticeships.

**Recommendation 6:** Project leads should establish links and further develop current links with specialist services to work with young people who have more complex needs or higher risk, as well as with local organisations and businesses who can offer care leavers high quality opportunities that improve employment prospects. Encourage dedicated roles, like the Experienced Practitioners, to lead this work.

## Implications

The above lessons have implications for both the project and the evaluation.

Although the participation work engaged young people on a regular basis from early stages, this had somewhat limited reach, primarily with those actively participating in SpeakerBox. Similarly, the Unlock-It programme, group-work and ReConnect programme worked with only a small proportion of care leavers. This means most care leavers were largely unaffected by the CLP at the end of the evaluation period.

Given the prolonged set-up time, de-prioritisation of the ADV, and challenges faced delivering the STAIRS pilot, less time was available for the project activities to achieve outcomes. Where it has, these are primarily service-level and staff outcomes. The new recruits and ways of working introduced by the CLP are not yet fully embedded so most care leavers will not yet feel their impact (whether positive, negative or unchanging). Some outcomes were observable for the small cohorts directly engaged. The impact on

care leavers of the service-level changes, if sustainable once project funding ends, cannot be determined by this evaluation. This also presented significant challenges for assessing the project's value for money.

## **Project legacy and sustainability**

The project finished on 31 March 2020 when Catch22's involvement ended. Plans were put in place for Southwark Council to continue most activities. During the last year of the project, decisions were often made with sustainability in mind. For example, the social capital work will be passed on to one of the Experienced Practitioners who is in a permanent post. Also, the website consists primarily of static information, given there is limited resource within the Council for someone to update it regularly.

Having such plans in place is an important starting point but additional factors will influence whether these can be successfully embedded. Initially, it will require leadership that pushes the plan forward, including the service managers and any staff directly involved in delivering the activities. Crucially, staff should seek to build buy-in across the service, which should be facilitated by an 'in-house' approach. The sustainability of these changes will also depend on the stability of the service moving forward.

## **Future development and wider application**

At present, there are no plans to develop project activities beyond Southwark Council. As these continue to embed, Southwark Council should regularly review the impact on outcomes. For example, the Unlock-It programme demonstrated positive outcomes in its first round and this should be refined and tested again. If the results are promising, it may want to consider sharing the learning more widely.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Project theory of change

Given the multiple changes to the project throughout delivery, the project theory of change was revised on several occasions. Such an iterative approach is recommended so that the theory of change reflects the project. However, it is important to recognise the extent to which these changed over time and the impact this has on the likelihood of achieving the intended outcomes and impacts. To summarise:

- Figure 2 depicts the most up to date CLP project theory of change, developed by the evaluation team for inclusion in this report.
- Figure 3 depicts the CLP project theory of change updated following a workshop with Catch22 and Southwark Council in December 2018.
- Figure 4 is theory of change provided in the funding bid, developed by Catch22 and Southwark Council.

Figure 2: Care Leavers Partnership theory of change – March 2020

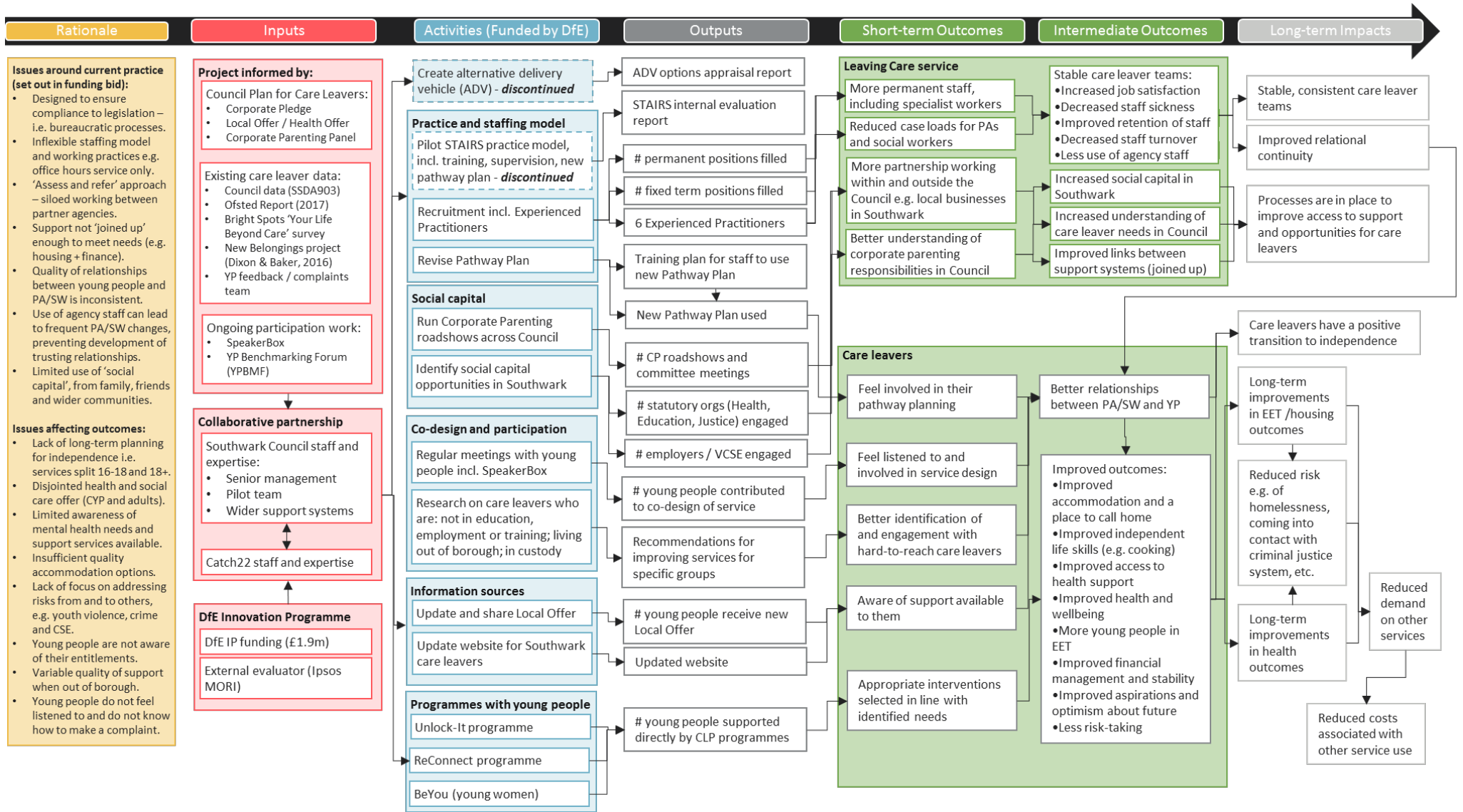


Figure 3: Care Leavers Partnership theory of change – December 2018

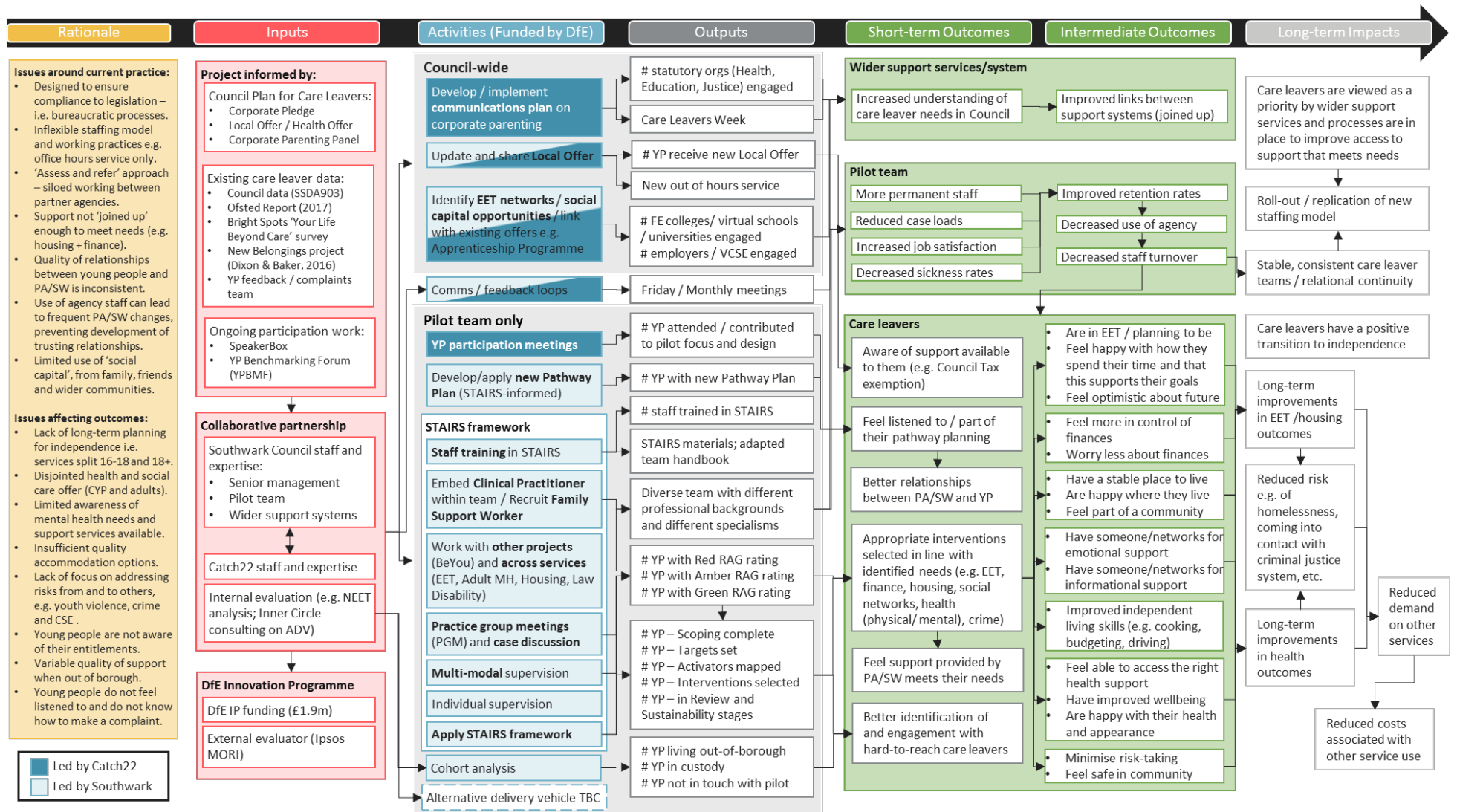
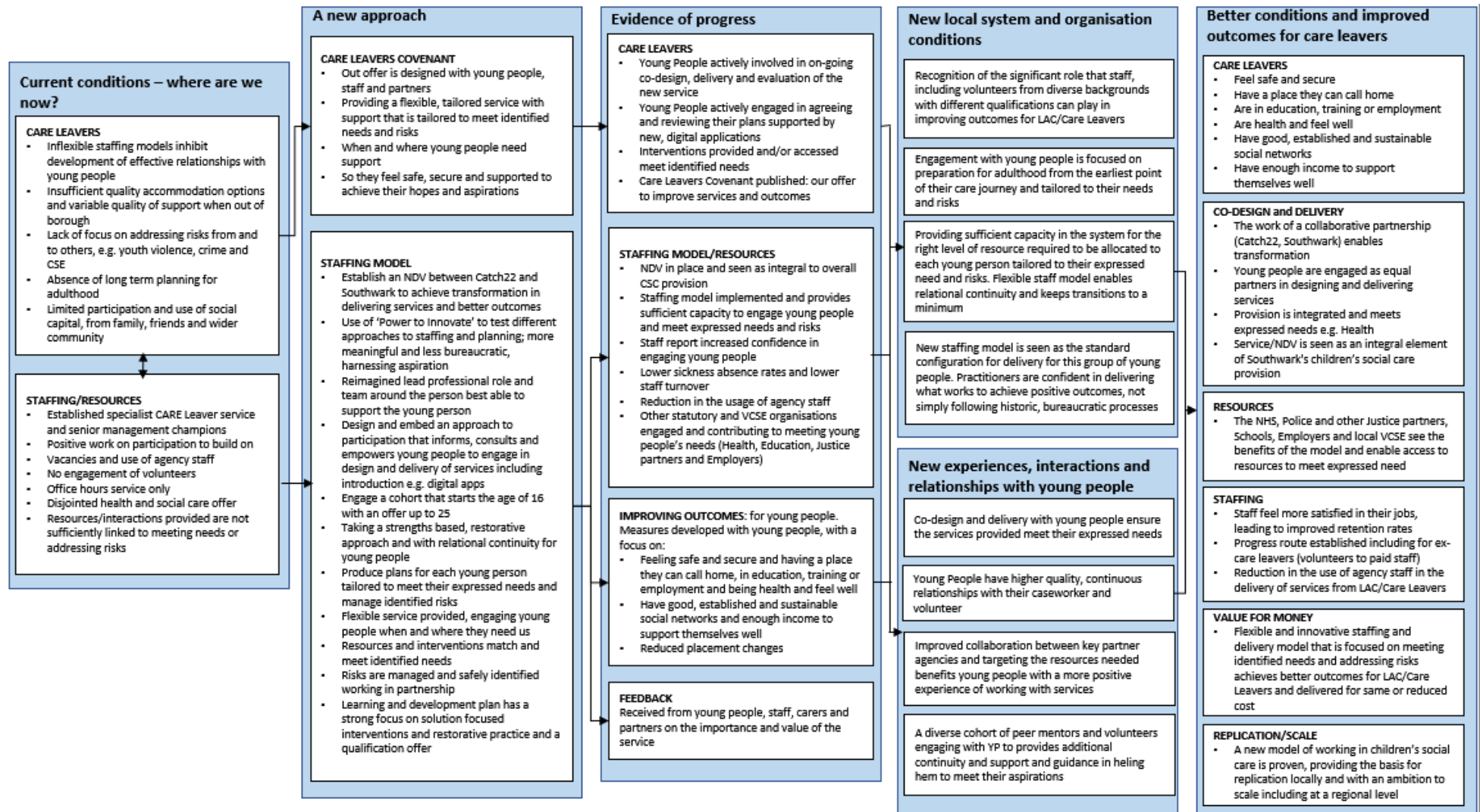


Figure 4: Care Leavers Partnership theory of change – Original bid



## Appendix 2: Relevant research with care leavers in Southwark

### Evaluation of the 'New Belongings' project

The New Belongings project ran in 2 phases in 2013/14 and 2015/16 with the support of the DfE funding The Care Leavers' Foundation to create the New Belongings approach and project. The overall aim of the project was for local authorities to improve their services for care leavers by applying the experience and expertise of their care leavers to influence change within the service, to ultimately lead to improved outcomes for care leavers. There were 29 local authorities which participated over the duration of the 2 phases and there was a wealth of different approaches and results across authorities, which were captured within an evaluation of the project.

The New Belongings Methodology specified 6 steps to help prepare authorities for tailoring their own plan to increase the role of care leavers within their decision-making process. A summary of the 6 steps are:

1. Conduct a survey of local care leavers to understand their priorities and desires for change, and to reach out to care leavers to show they want to improve what is offered to care leavers.
2. Prepare a plan for improvement reflecting good practice, guidance and legislation and better understanding of local needs. This should highlight what, how and who is responsible for delivering improvements to the service.
3. Establish a forum for care leavers to be a platform where they can shape the decisions within the service which impact them, along with discuss the key issues which they have as care leavers.
4. Review of the role and experience of PAs to be clear how the support given by PAs meets the needs of care leavers, this includes an assessment of caseloads and pathway plans.
5. Make progress on instilling corporate parenting within the Council through engagement with the senior leadership of the Council, especially chief executive officers, who naturally hold the most influence.
6. Utilise the political leadership of the Council to engage the wider community to create more opportunities for care leavers to fully participate within their communities.

In Southwark, the New Belongings project focused on improving the Council's engagement with their care leavers community through empowering and providing opportunities to care leavers to have their voice heard within the Council through a range

of different activities. As a result of following the New Belongings methodology, the Council decided that embedding the core issues of loneliness, mental health and isolation within their activities would be central to their approach and this decision was supported by national-level messages, not just their own research. Based on this, mental health and emotional wellbeing were key focuses in several of their activities.

Listed below are some of the activities which were conducted as part of the project:

- Care Leaver projects ran which acted as a platform for care leavers to develop relationships with one another and staff, and where they can discuss issues of physical and mental health in a less formal and a more engaging way. For example, a successful summer gardening project taught care leavers how to grow vegetables and gardening, with a big focus on discussing health and how connecting with nature can improve wellbeing.
- Establishment of the 'Young Minds' Partnership where Young Minds ran workshops on coping strategies and managing emotions.
- Promotion of SpeakerBox as a forum where care leavers can discuss key issues and steer the Council through engagement with senior Council leaders and the Corporate Parenting Committee. In addition to this, the SpeakerBox magazine helped raise awareness of care leavers and news of interest, with care leavers engaged within the development and editorial process.
- Creation of the New Belongings Forum which planned to create youth led videos on emotional health amongst other things relevant to care leavers.
- Young Inspectors opportunity for care leavers to inspect the properties which the Council's Housing department provide to their young people.
- Establishment of an out of hours emergency number for young people to call if needed.

The project had a positive impact in Southwark and different activities continued up until the CLP and became central to its development. For example, SpeakerBox continued to develop under the CLP as a platform for participation and engagement with the service. The impact in Southwark of the project was recognised when the Council ran an award ceremony which celebrated the triumphs of their care leavers, both big and small.

The evaluation of the New Belongings project assessed each of the participating authorities and how they used the approach and what they achieved.<sup>16</sup> The levels of success varied across authorities, but the evaluation found that those who embraced the

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<sup>16</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/562139/DFE-RR616-New\\_Belongings\\_programme\\_evaluation.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/562139/DFE-RR616-New_Belongings_programme_evaluation.pdf)



key features generally reported the approach to be most useful and this helped them improve their offer to care leavers.

## **Bright Spots ‘Your Life Beyond Care’ survey**

Bright Spots 2018 ‘Your Life Beyond Care’ care leaver survey succeeded the ‘Your Life, Your Care’ surveys for children in care. The aim of the survey was to give an insight into how care leavers feel about their lives which can be assessed nationally, but also locally. In total, 474 care leavers completed the survey in 6 participating local authorities in 2018, with 60 of these being care leavers from Southwark.

The survey had 40 questions which aimed to capture care leavers’ views on their own well-being completed online. The focus was on capturing care leavers’ subjective well-being, wanting to understand how they feel about their lives to understand whether care leavers are flourishing both nationally and within their authority. Personal Advisers were asked to promote the survey to young people but were not to be present when the care leaver completed the survey, instead the survey permitted a list of trusted adults to help with completing the survey, including participation officers, accommodation providers, and education and employment advisers.

In June 2018, Coram Voice in collaboration with the University of Bristol published the ‘Your Life Beyond Care’ survey findings for 60 Southwark Council care leavers.

Some pertinent findings from the survey include:

- Most care leavers (72%) trusted their leaving care worker. Those who reported more negative experiences noted how their workers could be hard to contact and did not always do what they said they would do.
- Care leavers experienced fewer changes of worker compared to young people in care (aged 11-18) in Southwark.
- While many care leavers felt involved in pathway planning, 19% did not. They either did not know what a pathway plan was, did not have one or had rarely or never felt involved.
- Just over half of care leavers lived on their own. And 93% felt they had the skills needed to take care of themselves but 4 young people did not.
- Lack of money and health issues were the biggest barrier to having fun.
- Across all measures of well-being, care leavers had lower scores compared to young people in the general population: 12 (21%) care leavers had low well-being; 35% of care leavers reported high levels of anxiety compared to 18% in the general population.



These findings helped paint a picture of the care leavers in Southwark and were used to inform the CLP design. For example, lack of money and health issues being barriers to fun can be linked to the group-work activities.

## Appendix 3: STAIRS pilot

The STAIRS pilot was proposed in early 2018 with team training starting in spring and summer 2018, after which the team started trialling the new ways of working with young people. The pilot team was 1 of 5<sup>17</sup> leaving care teams and included a caseload of approximately 100 care leavers as of April 2019. The pilot team previously supported a larger cohort of approximately 160 care leavers but a significant number were reallocated to other teams in February 2019 during the pilot period. The key activity in the pilot team involved clinical approaches to working based on the 'STAIRS' framework to practice (Hare & Shostak, 2017; see box below).

### Box 5: STAIRS framework (Hare & Shostak, 2017)

- S = **Scoping** – Clarity representing problems, who the key players are in the child or young person's life and what change is wanted by whom
- T = **Targets** – Going through a process of checking what is wanted by whom in order to agree what we're aiming for with as many people as possible, and an agreed way of tracking our progress
- A = **Activators** – Collaboratively identifying the multi-level activators of the problems with reaching our targets
- I = **Interventions** – Meaning anything anyone does, from the practical to the therapeutic, in order to impact on the activators
- R = **Review and Revise** – Real-life monitoring of movement towards targets and modelling going back and revising formulations and plans – experimenting together
- S = **Sustain** – Sustainability thought about from the outset in terms of types of interventions offered and plans for maintaining progress after closure – the bulk of the work!

In addition to a team manager, 3 social workers and 3 Personal Advisers (PAs), the pilot team included a clinical practitioner, Family Support Worker and Catch22 staff, such as the Participation Officer and Community Social Capital Manager.

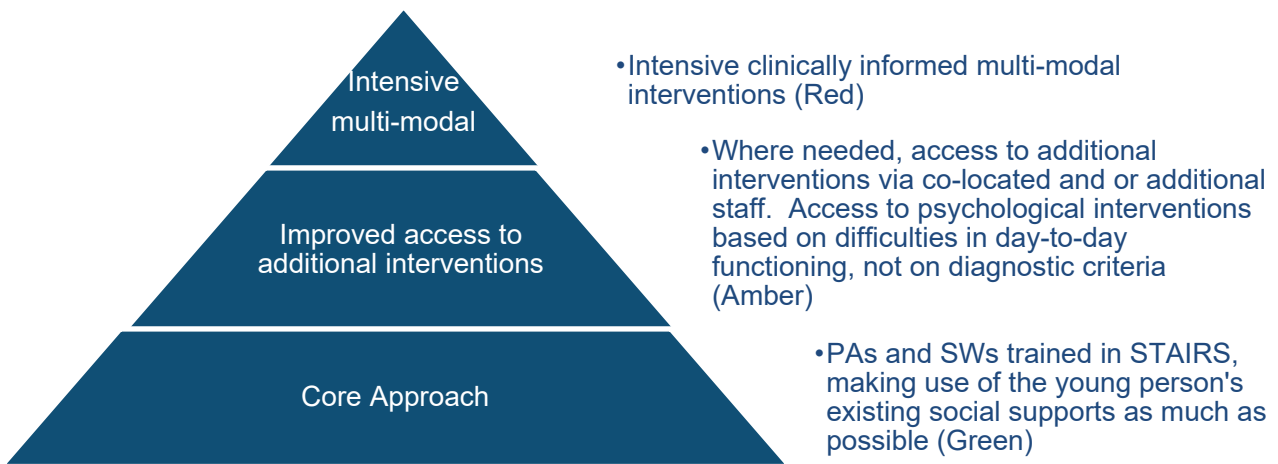
The STAIRS approach aimed to provide a framework that social workers and PAs could tailor according to young people's individual needs and identify appropriate interventions. Depending on needs and risk-levels, social workers and PAs would assign a RAG rating to each young person. This determined the intensity of the approach, as shown in the figure below. The pilot also included implementing a revised STAIRS-informed Pathway Plan.

Regular supervision and case discussion was intended to take place through Practice Group Meetings (PGM), multi-model group supervision, and individual (worker) supervision. The team also worked in partnership with BeYou, Southwark's 'Pause' programme.

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<sup>17</sup> A sixth leaving care team was added later.

**Figure 5: STAIRS approach and multi-modal model**



Source: Southwark Council, 2018.

The interim report in March 2019 highlighted that the pilot had encountered challenges, yet was making progress nonetheless. In the following months, unrest within the service and problems with embedding the framework continued and this led to the CLP's senior leadership agreeing to end the pilot in May 2019 and reintegrate the pilot team back into the rest of the service.

The CLP finalised an internal evaluation of the pilot in November 2019, which highlighted the key issues that led to the decision to end the trial. To summarise:

- The pilot was a top-down decision that did not sufficiently consider the readiness of the service for innovation. It was acknowledged that senior leadership should have engaged staff more to give them an opportunity to co-design the pilot. The consequence of this was that pilot staff did not have a sense of ownership in the pilot, as it felt it was being done 'to them' rather than 'with them'.
- STAIRS was a complex, multi-agency project and it required strong, committed leadership and organisational structures to be in place. The evaluation highlighted how this was not the case and senior leadership did not fully 'buy-in' to the project, while a new programme manager joined the CLP shortly before the project re-launched its implementation.
- Similarly, the RAG system was not implemented successfully because processes were not put in place for staff to access the appropriate agencies for the multi-modal group to support young people with 'Red' ratings. There was a lack of consensus on how these agencies should be engaged because their specialism may only relate to a small proportion of young people, which did not warrant their regular attendance at multi-modal group meetings. Additionally, staff were often

not in a position to deliver high-intensity work to 'Red' cases due to high caseloads.

- The decision to trial STAIRS only within the pilot team created some divisions in the service. The pilot team felt isolated and burdened by additional work, while the other teams felt a lack of support from senior leadership compared with the pilot team.
- There was a comprehensive 5-day training programme developed for the pilot, but staff turnover meant the training cycle needed to be repeated multiple times and staff understanding was at different stages across the team. In addition to this, the STAIRS handbook, which was supposed to develop organically and use case studies which the pilot team encountered, was executed poorly and a final handbook was never finalised.
- Pilot team staff felt the framework did not suit care leavers and was more suited to families rather than individuals. This was linked to staff having higher caseloads than the 'Keeping Families Together' team and because PAs are only in contact with young people every 8 weeks, which limited their time to use the framework properly. After encountering multiple challenges, staff began to feel deskilled and devalued because they felt they could not utilise their knowledge and experience to try other approaches.
- Weekly group supervision was viewed positively, but attendance became irregular as staff experienced increasing time pressure and did not consistently benefit from attending.

Despite these challenges, the evaluation also recognised some positive learning from the pilot and recommended that the CLP carry these forward, for instance, using a more collaborative approach with young people to develop their pathway plan.

## Appendix 4: List of project documentation reviewed

Document date	Document Name
Autumn 2018	Care Leavers Partnership high level plan PowerPoint slides.
November 2018	Care Leavers Partnership high level plan PDF.
November 2018	Final reflections on the Be You programme.
November 2018	Theory of change for social capital strand of CLP.
January 2019	PowerPoint presentation on the Corporate Parenting Roadshow events in December 2018.
January 2019	A gap analysis for social capital in Southwark by Catch22.
February 2019 – January 2020	CLP Monthly Highlight Reports
February 2019	Planned timeline for CLP.
March 2019	The proposal for the group-work pilot by Catch22.
April 2019	Analysis of factors leading to problems with STAIRS in April 2019.
May 2019	CLP Brand and Communications Audit paper.
June 2019	Excel plan for the Unlock-It programme pilot by the Unlock-It Coordinator.
June 2019	The evaluation of the group-work pilot by the group-work practitioner from Catch22.
July 2019	Workplan for the Corporate Parenting Committee for 2019/20.
October 2019	The itinerary plan for Care Leavers Week 2019.
October 2019	Promotional poster for Care Leavers Week 2019.
November 2019	The CLP's internal evaluation of the STAIRS pilot.
November 2019	Pilot feedback on the STAIRS pilot.
January 2020	Analysis of enablers and barriers to EET by Catch22.



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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:

[CSC.Research@education.gov.uk](mailto:CSC.Research@education.gov.uk) or [www.education.gov.uk/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus)