

# Tower Hamlets Corporate Parenting Strategy

2023 – 2028



# Contents

Foreword	3
Introduction	4
The context for developing this strategy	5
Children we care for and care experienced children	6
Our Pledge to children in our care and care experienced young people	7
Key messages from young people	9
Priority 1: Safe and stable home	10
Priority 2: Trusted and strong relationships	12
Priority 3: Education and aspirations	14
Priority 4: Health and emotional wellbeing	16
Priority 5: Co-production	18
Making the strategy happen	20



## Foreword to our children and young people

When a child comes into our care, we become their 'corporate parent', and there is no responsibility more important to us than this.

You deserve nothing but our very best and we know what type of parent we are striving to be. Not just good, but exceptional, and willing to do whatever is necessary to ensure you have every opportunity to develop, realise your aspirations and thrive. We aim to show you unconditional love and care as every good parent should.

We know that the things you need most are the same as they are for any child – to be loved in a safe and stable home.

We are asking everyone to think about how they can play a part in offering you more opportunities and making life better. Part of how we are doing this is through a 'Pledge', which is a set of commitments that show how everyone can contribute.

From opening the door to a new experience, learning a skill or being that additional support at the right moment, we will concentrate on removing any barriers and creating the environment where you can see the possibilities in every part of your life.

We are also seeking targeted offers, such as apprenticeships specifically for our care experienced young people, so that our partners take on greater corporate parenting responsibilities. By working with the Pan London Care Leavers Compact, extra support will come from joined up efforts with other local authorities as well.

This strategy shows you what we plan to do to in response to the things you have told us are most important. These are the 'key messages' that you shared with us and

you can see them throughout this document.

You have our full commitment that we will be tireless in our efforts to deliver the work set out in this document.

The opportunities available to you will also be boosted by the investment we are making in services and support for all young people in the borough. This includes universal free school meals, educational allowances and bursaries, and transformation of the Youth Service.

We want you to be able to see and feel the difference this work makes to your experiences. We will keep checking back in with you about the progress we are making. We look forward to hearing what you think.



Mayor Lutfur Rahman



James Thomas,

## Introduction

Corporate parenting is the term that describes the shared responsibility of elected members, all the staff in the council and partner agencies towards you - the children in our care and our care experienced young people.

You were involved in the development of this strategy right from the start and the contents have formed around what you told us is most important (the key messages on page 9).

It covers the next 5 years and sets out a plan for how we will bring everyone together and work with you to improve your experiences and make your lives better. The strategy is made up of a 'Pledge' (for everyone to be a part of) and a set of five priorities with actions to show what we are going to do.

We know that things will change during the next five years so we will keep talking to you about these plans. Together we will update them regularly so they stay focused on what you want to see happening.

The Tower Hamlets Corporate Parenting Board (CPB), including its young people's representatives, will take the lead on making sure this strategy, and the actions it describes, are delivered. You can see more about how this will be done at the end of this document in the section 'Making the Strategy Happen'.



## The context for developing this strategy

When producing this strategy we have taken into account legal requirements as well as the relevant things happening nationally and locally. We have outlined what this includes below.

Section 1 of Children and Social Work Act 2017 (Section 1) sets out seven corporate parenting principles which local authorities must have regard to for children looked after or care experienced young people. In February 2018 some guidance for local authorities (like Tower Hamlets Council) called 'Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care experienced young people' was published.

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care was published in May 2022. The review examined the needs, experiences and outcomes of the children supported by social care and put forward recommendations for changes.

In February 2023 the UK government published its implementation strategy and consultation called 'Stable Homes, Built on Love'. The strategy responded to the independent review and concentrated on how to provide nurturing, stable and loving homes for children in care and care experienced young people.

In December 2022 Ofsted announced the introduction of a new judgement for care experienced young people to the framework for inspecting local authority children's services (ILACS). The new judgement will focus on experiences and progress of care experienced young people. This will include consideration of whether local authorities are making good decisions for care experienced young people, and what they are doing to support them into adulthood.



## Children we care for and care experienced young people

The majority of our children are from Black, Asian and Multi Ethnic backgrounds (83% at Dec 2022). **25%** of children in our care are from a Bangladeshi background and they are significantly under-represented when looking at the overall population of under 18 year olds.

Children in our care are more likely to have Special Educational Needs (SEN) **34.9%** have an Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP) and **20.9%** are with SEN Support (for 2022). This compares to 5.4% of all pupils in all Tower Hamlets schools with an EHCP and 11.6% with SEN Support.

There were **301** children in our care in Mar 2023 (this was 334 for Mar 2022). There are variations over time but given the overall rise in the population it is unlikely that the number will fall in the near future.

Our Through Care Service was supporting 457 care experienced young people between the ages of 14 – 25 in Mar 2023 (this was 455 at Mar 2022). The age distribution of our care experienced young people is likely to continue growing older following the introduction of support up to the age of 25 and the majority move into semi-independent accommodation when they become 18.

Age groups for children in our care – **31%** were under 10 years old, **31%** were aged 10 to 15 and **38%** were aged 16 to 17 at Mar 2023. Tower Hamlets tends to have an older population of children and the rise in the number of unaccompanied minors is likely to affect the number aged 16+.

Children in our care achieve Attainment 8 scores (GCSEs / Key Stage 4) consistently above the national average – **32.4** compared to **23.2** in 2020/21 (the 8 subjects which make up Attainment 8 include English and maths)

77% of our care experienced young people were in education, employment or training in Mar 2023 (an increase from 64% in 2021/22)

94% of our care experienced young people were in suitable accommodation in Mar 2023 (an increase from 89% in 2021/22)

## Our Pledge to children in our care and care experienced young people

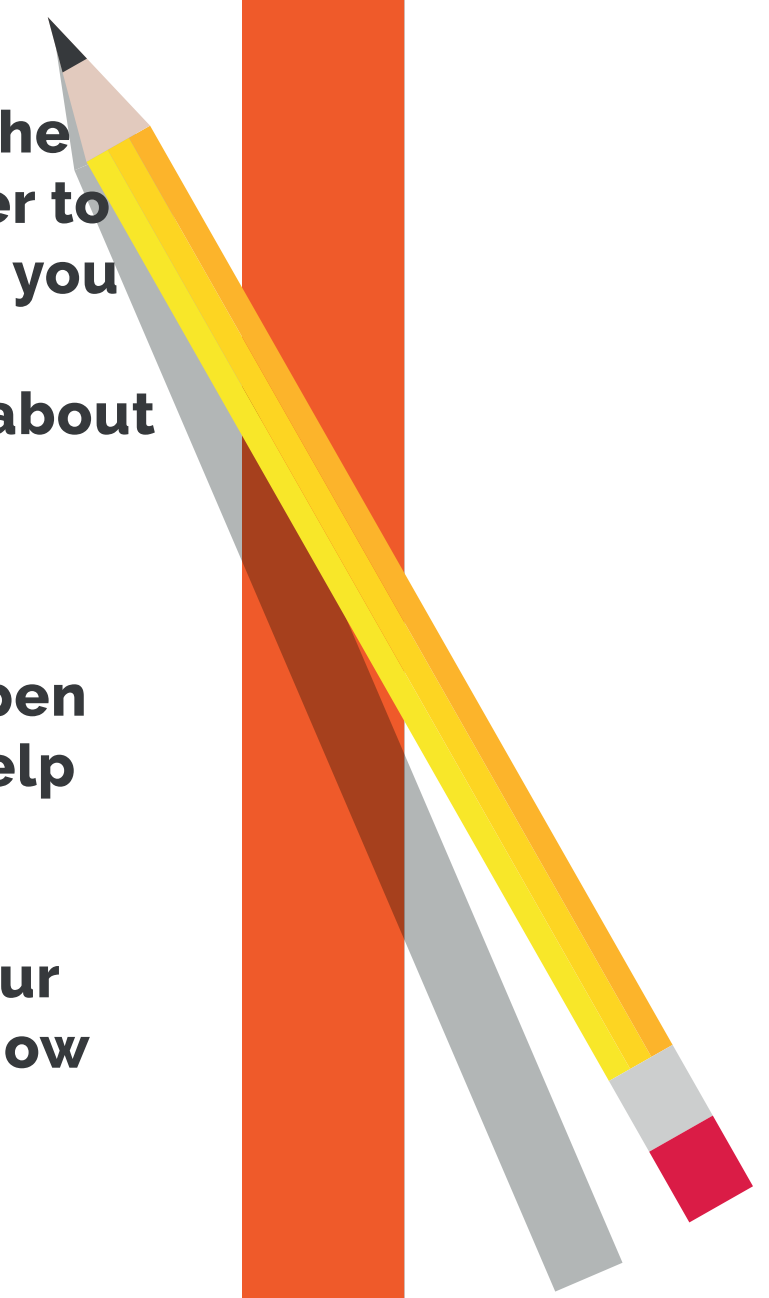
Our Pledge is a set of commitments that we are asking everyone to sign up to – all parts of the council and partner organisations across all sectors.

The purpose of the Pledge is to challenge everyone to do more. These commitments describe the practical steps everyone can take to contribute to making a real difference to your lives. We will promote sign up to the Pledge as we prepare to launch the strategy and beyond. We will report on what has been done as a result of putting the Pledge into action as part of our regular progress reports (see page 20 'Making the Strategy Happen').



### Our Pledge

- We will ask ourselves 'what can we do?' to play a part in making your lives better
- We will join with others (across the whole borough) working together to form a community of support for you
- We will take time to learn more about the experience of care, so we understand you better
- We will work to empower you, open the door to opportunities, and help you make the most of them
- We will look for ways to make your voice heard in what we do, and how we do it



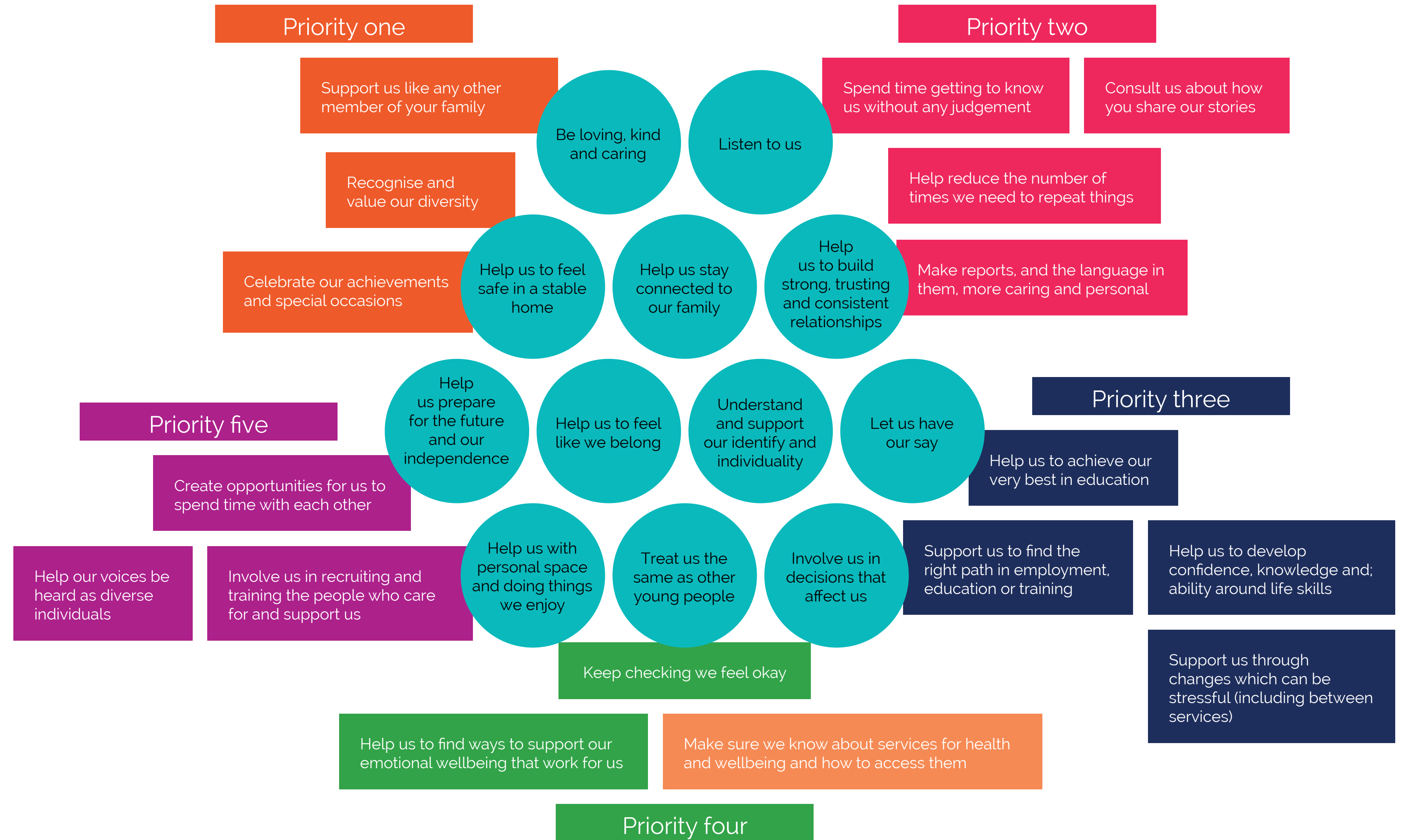
## Our Priorities: Tower Hamlet's Corporate Parenting Priorities for the next five years





# What you told us – key messages from young people

These messages are the foundation of this strategy. They are central to our pledge and all of our plans for the future. Our focus is on how we can respond more effectively and consistently to what you want to see happening. They came out of a series of workshops where you held discussions about what mattered most to you. These messages highlight what is fundamental in making life good. We also reviewed what you shared with us during other meetings, events and activities to help shape these messages. The cycle of feedback and review with you will continue as we work to respond to what you've told us.



## Priority 1: Safety and stability - ensuring you feel loved and well cared for in a home that is right for you

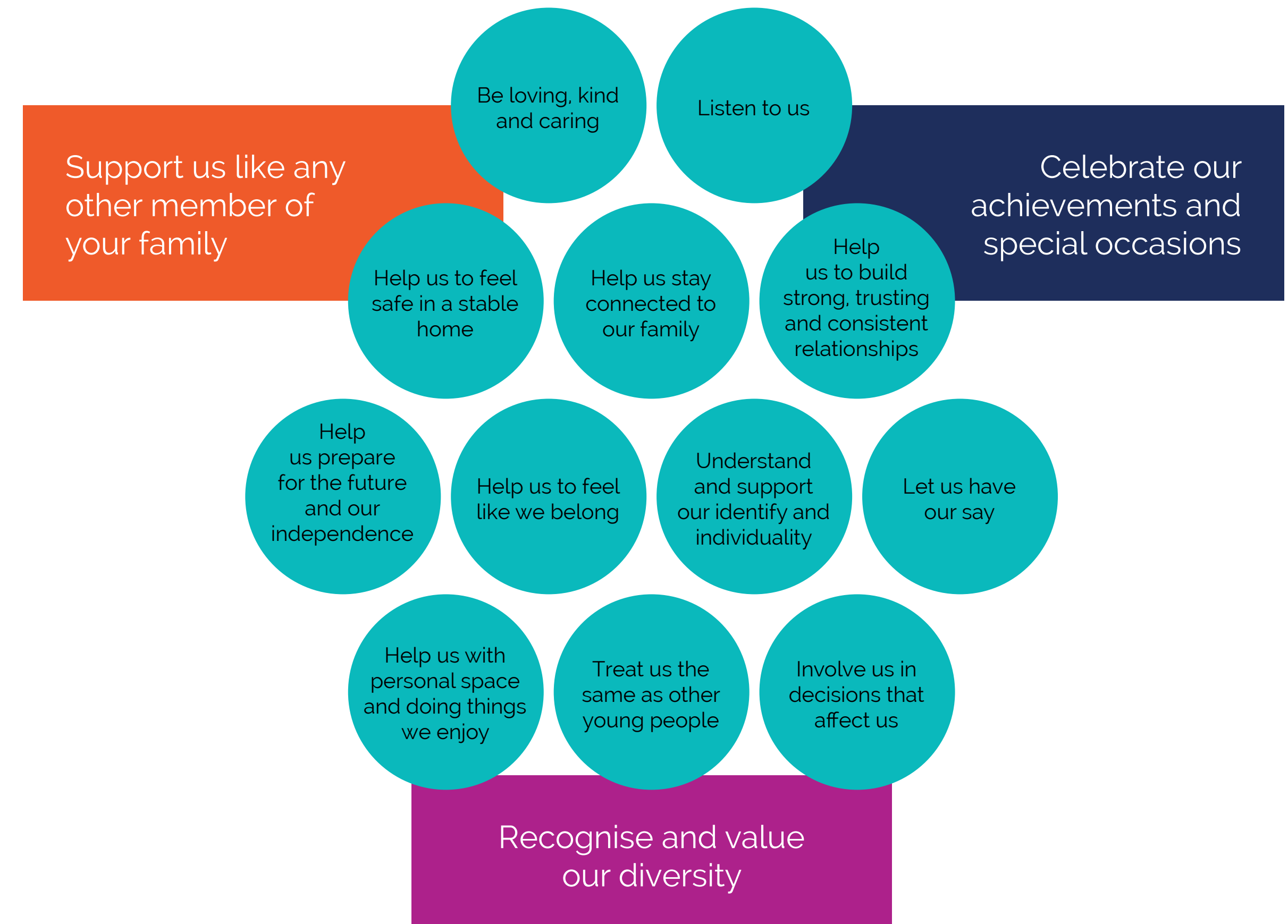
We know that living in a happy and secure home is fundamental to your wellbeing. We want every child to feel loved, cared for and to enjoy life so that they can grow into a confident and successful young adult.

Your individual needs and your safety are central to how we seek the right home for you where you can live in a nurturing environment without disruptions.

Joyful celebrations for the special days and events in your life are wonderful moments and we will cherish them with you at every stage.

We are committed to ensuring that children live in a home that promotes their culture and identity, and they live close to their family and community wherever possible.

## What you told us – key messages from young people



## Year 1 strategic focus: creating and maintaining stability for children and young people through homes where they feel loved, cared for and secure

### What we will do:

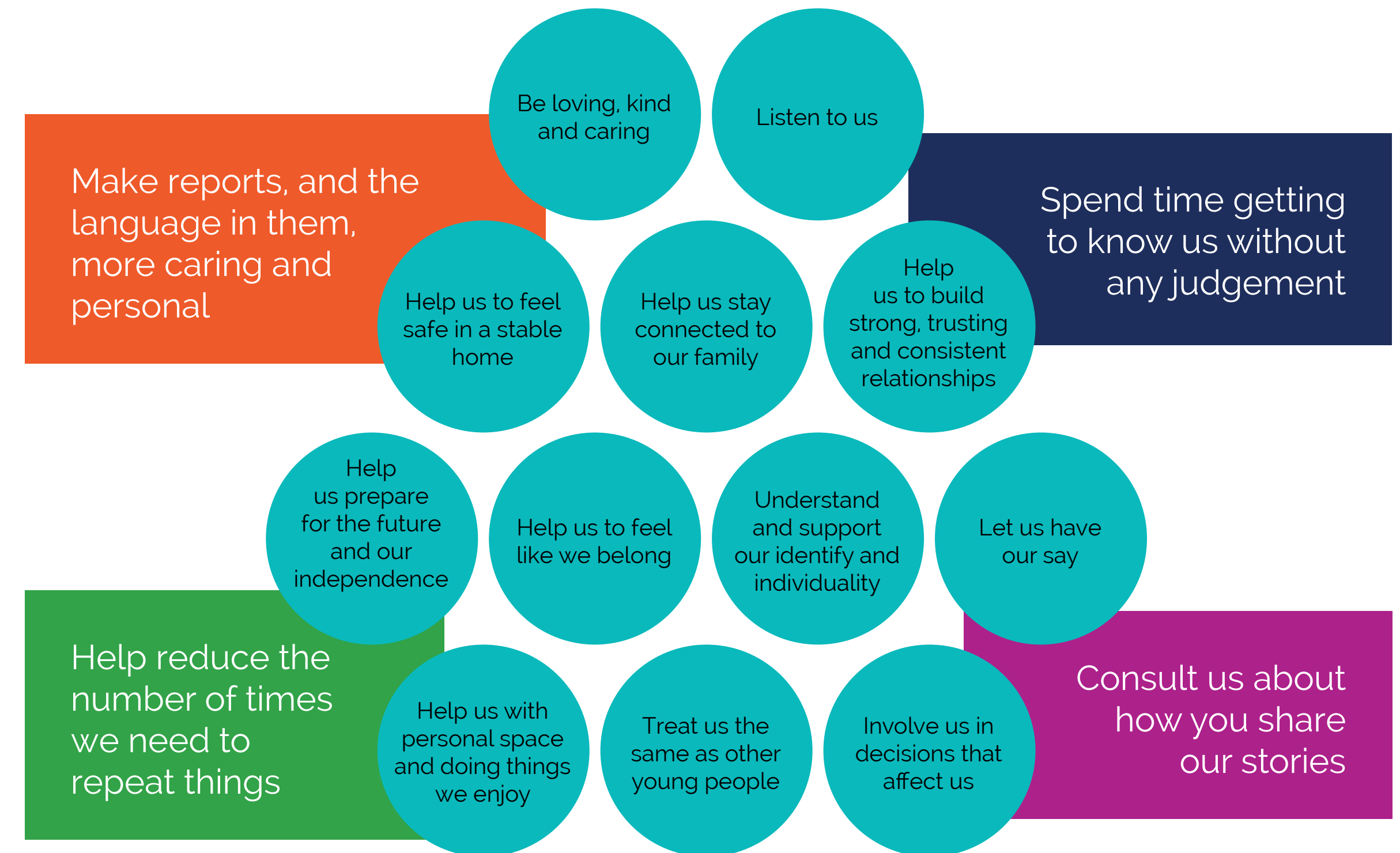
- Help our children to experience long term, stable living arrangements as much as possible - within homes where they can build strong relationships, feel like they belong, and have a wide support network. The actions we are taking to achieve this include carefully planning what is needed for every child through groups and meetings set up just for this purpose (we use the phrases 'permanency' & 'placement stability' to describe this work)
- Ensure our children live in a home that meets their diverse needs as much as possible. We will do this by supporting carers to make sure children's religious, cultural and identity needs are met and by working to have more Foster Carers from the communities where we know this is needed
- Create a way of accessing children and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) to provide support if difficulties are being experienced that affect the stability of where a child lives (we call this a 'pathway')
- Help more children to live in a home in their local community, with everything that is familiar to them, by increasing the number of Foster Carers who can offer this within the borough. We will do this through the actions set out in our Fostering Recruitment Strategy 2022-25
- Build on the supportive and caring environment that we offer to our carers. Our training programme and a competitive incentives package will be important parts of how we do this. We will also do more to development strong, caring communities through expanding a programme called the 'Mockingbird' model
- Support our children who have contact with the Youth Justice Service (YJS) with an approach that recognises and understands the potential impacts of their experiences. This will include specialist training for professionals, support from the YJS Education Officer and improved access to physical and mental health services
- Make sure that unaccompanied minors who come into our care are supported in ways that are equal to any other child. This includes through having extra social care resources in place and learning what works best through our membership of the London Asylum Seeking Consortium (a partnership for councils in London).

## Priority 2:

### Trusted and strong relationships – surrounding you with caring people who work hard to listen, understand and respond to your needs

Being able to build consistent, positive relationships with all the people who support you is vital. How we listen to you and respect your experiences plays an important part in developing strong and trusted connections to everyone around you. We recognise that all children are different and we need to pay special attention to understanding what life is like for you and what relationships are important to you. Helping you to build and maintain support networks, full of caring people, is a priority for us and we will keep looking for ways to do more of this.

## What you told us – key messages from young people



## Year 1 strategic focus: building of deep, enduring and trusting relationships which support children and young people in every dimension of their lives

### What we will do:

- Make sure that building good relationships is at the very heart of how all professionals work and offer support. This includes paying close attention to the time professionals spend with children & families, how they are listened to and being open and honest (we set out what this means in practice in our framework called 'Better Together')
- Make sure having fun and doing the things that children enjoy is recognised as an important part of how relationships are built with social workers, other professionals and carers. This will include organising events such as the 'Just4U' days with an emphasis on having a good time in a relaxed setting
- Help more children to build strong, supportive relationships with family members, and other people they care about, through initiatives like Lifelong Links, that help our children to stay connected or reconnect with people they might not have been able to see for a while and keep them in their lives
- Help make sure our children feel supported as individuals, and have opportunities to try new things and develop their confidence, through initiatives like mentoring and befriending
- Use a 'child friendly' approach, and language that is respectful and caring in records and documents - such as the letters written after a review. This includes work on how Care Plans are produced, which is being led by our Independent Reviewing Officers
- Communicate in a personal way, that recognises individuality and seeks to explain decisions and arrangements that affect our children clearly. This will include groups of professionals looking at the language we use so that we avoid words and phrases that are unhelpful or too technical
- Review the service we provide for care experienced children who are 16+ years old. We will concentrate on designing a service that starts to plan for the future with them at the age that is most helpful to them. This will include an emphasis on building strong, consistent relationships between young people and the people who support them (like Personal Advisors).

## Priority 3:

# Education and aspirations – helping to find what inspires you, achieve the best possible outcomes and create the future you want

Good quality education and access to lots of different opportunities to try new things, and develop new skills, are essential to finding the path through life that is right for you. Like all children and young people you might experience challenges during your education journey and as you make plans for the future. We will support you every step of the way with a focus on what you as an individual need, especially when things change. We will always have high aspirations for you, helping to create the foundations you can stand on to flourish.

## What you told us – key messages from young people



## **Year 1 strategic focus:** more opportunities for children and young people to try new things, whether it is just for fun, to increase confidence, or to take steps towards future plans

### **What we will do:**

- Act as the education champions for every one of our children by helping them to achieve their goals and overcome any issues they experience. This could include changes such as where you live or go to school or college.
- Our specialist teachers (from the 'Virtual School') will remain a constant always supporting our children to settle by building a network of Designated Teachers and support workers in their schools. Together they will capture the needs of our children in 'Personal Education Plans' celebrating achievements, tracking progress and listening to and supporting aspirations for the future.
- Offer exciting and diverse opportunities to try new things so children can find out what inspires them. Such as the 'Give it a go' programme which provides access to activities with places like the English National Ballet and West Ham United
- Bring together education providers, business and others who play a part in education, employment and training to create a network of support and opportunities. This could include tutoring, work experience and career mentoring
- Create apprenticeship opportunities in the council for care experienced young people. Our programme will include a support package that is designed to help through all the stages of an apprenticeship - in the workplace, whilst learning and for their wellbeing
- Improve the 'Local Offer for Care Leavers' and the 'Know Now App' so that finding out about rights and entitlements is even easier. Our children will lead on making sure these resources provide what they are looking for
- Recruit a dedicated housing officer to help with identification of the right housing option and support for our children
- Refresh our joint housing protocol so that roles and responsibilities for different services are clear for everyone. This will help make sure decisions are made as quickly as possible and the right outcomes are achieved.

## Priority 4:

# Health and emotional wellbeing – supporting you, through warm and nurturing care, to stay physically and emotionally healthy

Supporting your physical and emotional wellbeing, so it is the best it can be, is important for every part of your life. Being able to easily access kind and caring health care professionals (like GPs & nurses) who understand your needs is essential. We will work with people in health services to provide you with clear information about what is available and how it can help. Our focus will be on making services work better for you and that they respond to your feedback on what is most important.

## What you told us – key messages from young people





## Year 1 strategic focus: supporting good emotional wellbeing and mental health for children in our care and care experienced young people

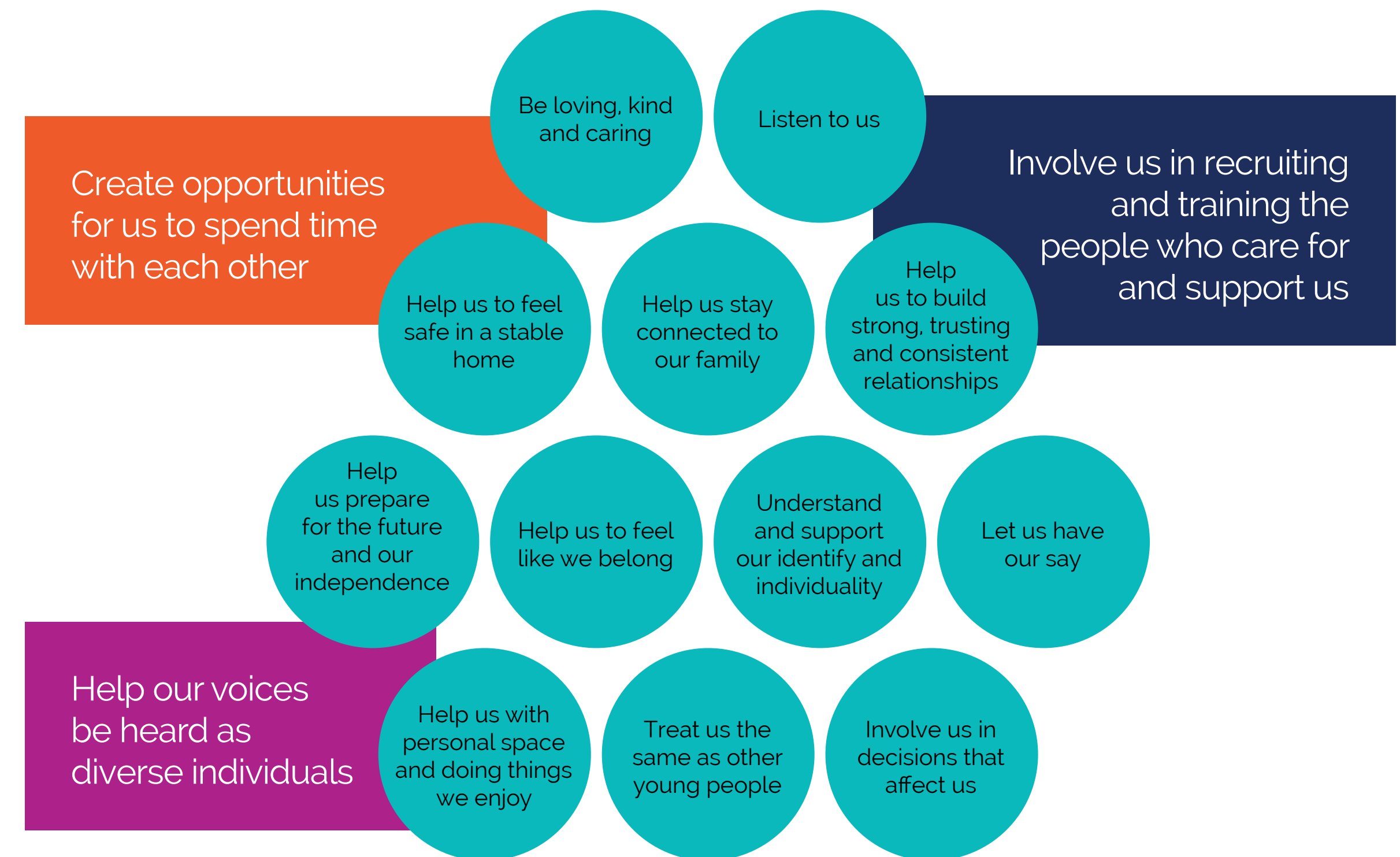
### What we will do:

- Make sure we offer emotional wellbeing screening for all of our children when they come into care as well as advice, assessment and intervention from the Children and Adolescents Mental Health Service at any time (for under 18 year olds)
- Explore how we can make sure our care experienced young people who are 18 & over find and access support for mental health & emotional wellbeing more easily. We will investigate whether this could be through a dedicated post which would help with providing advice and guidance to them and their personal advisers.
- Work with colleagues in Public Health to develop a joint strategic analysis of the health needs of our children in care and experienced young people to inform service planning and provision
- Improve how health assessments offered to our children are made available and carried out. This will include sharing more information with children, foster carers and professionals about how to get the best out of them
- Use the 'Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire' to help identify any health needs or issues at the earliest possible stage so that our children don't experience delays in being supported
- Work with partners in health organisations to develop their strategy for health services to children we care for and care experienced young people. The strategy aims to improve experiences with health services such as GPs, nurses and hospitals. This will include through listening to the views and wishes of our children.
- We will explore how we could introduce access to dedicated health care professionals at places used by our children – to help them get the best out of health services.
- Help make sure that our care experienced young people know about and use the pre-paid prescription for access to free NHS prescriptions
- Explore how we can offer cheaper access to leisure services and health and wellbeing focused facilities for our children and young people

## Priority 5: Co-production – placing your experiences and views at the centre of what we do and how we do it

We are committed to increasing and improving the ways in which you can share what you think and can see that we have listened carefully and responded in a meaningful way. It is also essential to consistently show that we are acting on your feedback and demonstrating the difference it has made. Like all children, the views of those with care experience are unique and individual. We will remember your diversity as we work with you to create more ways to make your voice heard and develop new ways of being involved in what matters to you.

## What you told us – key messages from young people



## **Year 1 strategic focus:** empowering children and young people so they feel confident, comfortable and well equipped for making their voices heard and getting involved

### **What we will do:**

- Put forward a proposal to introduce care experience as a 'protected characteristic' to help tackle inequality and improve outcomes for our children. This would mean that we will look at the impact of decisions the council makes about services and policies on our care experienced children. We would then consider if we need to make changes to ensure they are not disadvantaged.
- Offer new ways for children, young people and families to have their say about support and services - including through a new survey which they can use to tell us about their views, wishes and experiences
- Provide more chances for children who have experienced care to get together, have fun and support each other. The Children Living in Care Council Groups will lead on designing opportunities and activities with them that respond to what they want to see
- Create more opportunities for our children to raise issues that matter to them, and steer how they are addressed. This will include creating an 'All Participation Forum' where they can join forces with members of the youth council, young mayor, deputy young mayors and youth empowerment board
- Expand the opportunities for involvement in recruitment and training of the people who work with and support our children and families. This will include preparation and planning so that our children can join in with confidence and get the most out of experiences
- Bring our children in to the work we do to design services and choose providers that affect them, such as being involved in the process to select supported housing providers. This will include making sure they are well prepared to take part in activities like evaluating the information that organisations provide
- Explore ways to develop the location 'Kitcat Terrace' into a resources centre for our children people which they will help shape. This will include what the space looks like, how it will be used and the sort of support and facilities that are available there.

## Making the strategy happen

The Tower Hamlets Corporate Parenting Board will be responsible for seeing that the strategy is delivered. The following will be produced for the board, and all the people who have an interest in the strategy, so that progress can be reviewed regularly. Children Living in Care Council Representatives, who are members of the board, will be actively involved in monitoring delivery of the strategy.

- Quarterly Progress Reports – each report will summarise progress against the actions for all priority areas. Any barriers or issues will be identified so that a way of addressing them can be found.
- Action Plan Annual Review – at the end of every calendar year the action plan will be reviewed and refreshed. We will work with children and young people to make sure the action plan remains focused on the things that matter most to them. The review will also be a chance to look at any changes that have occurred in the year that might impact our plans, and make any amendments needed to respond.
- The Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report – this report will provide a full overview on progress in delivering actions within the strategy on a yearly basis.

