

Corporate Parenting Panel Supplementary Agenda



2. Minutes of the previous meeting (To Follow) (Pages 3 - 24)

To approve the minutes of the meetings held on Tuesday 24 November 2020 and Thursday 10 December 2020 as an accurate record.

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Corporate Parenting Panel

Meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel held on Tuesday, 24 November 2020 at 5.00pm.
This meeting was held virtually.

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Alisa Flemming (Chair);

Councillors Shafi Khan, Bernadette Khan, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Maria Gatland and Helen Redfern

Co-optee Members

Virtual School: Shelley Davies

EMPIRE and Council staff

Foster Carer Representatives: Angela Christmas

Health Commissioners: Pasquale Brammer, Roneeta Campbell-Butler

CLA Designated Health Professionals: Dr Julia Simpson

Also

Present:

Nick Pendry (Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care)

Rodica Cobarzan (Head of Service - Social Work with Children Looked After and Carer Leavers)

Mick McCarthy (Service Manager)

Nana Bonsu (Head of Service for Systemic, Clinical Practice and Adolescent Services)

Jo Feeney (Performance Specialist)

Sara Lewis (Children's Housing Representative)

Apologies: Co-optee Members: Sarah Bailey, Ashleigh Searle and Manny Kwamin

PART A

37/20 Disclosures of interest

There were none.

38/20 Urgent Business (if any)

There was none.

39/20 Work Programme

Members of the Panel reviewed the work programme of the 2020-21 municipal year.

The Chair clarified that the upcoming Panel meeting in December was scheduled in place of the cancelled meeting in July due to the pandemic and national lockdown before there was a required legislation in place for meetings to take place virtually. The topic to that meeting would be on *sufficiency*.

As Members reviewed the work programme for the remainder of the year, the Chair proposed for all reports going forward to address financial aspects to the titled report. Councillor Maria Gatland proposed for a report on *missing children* to be brought forward to Panel. This was agreed by the Chair, and requested that this be heard in January or March in line with the Children's Improvement Board for up-to-date data.

Councillor Jerry Fitzpatrick proposed to hear a report in respect to the *implications for corporate parenting of the aspects of the renewal plan*. This was to also include alongside the financial issues, and representation from children and carers. The Chair agreed to have a detailed report of this to the Panel meeting in January.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to agree the work programme for the next Panel meeting and future meetings.

40/20 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 29 September 2020 were agreed as an accurate record with the inclusion of:

- Comments raised by Councillor Bernadette Khan in respect of the serious case reviews, and the request for the Panel to hold a thorough discussion about what was happening with serious case reviews and its practice.

41/20 Update on actions agreed at previous meeting(s)

Officers updated the Panel with the status of the actions agreed at the previous Panel meeting.

In regards to the action in September 2020:

1 - To update the Panel with data relating to support given to young people in universities.

There was support in line with the Local Offer. Young people at university would have:

- Personal Adviser or Social Worker
- Pathway Plan
- General advice and assistance
- Visit once every two months

- The opportunity to reach out to Personal Adviser to seek support
- Vacation Accommodation - If a young person was at university and accommodation was not for 365 days a year, then they were entitled to services support. Alternatively, if the young person found somewhere for the holiday then the young person could be given up to £400.00 per month as a contribution towards rent. Other care leavers may be able to make arrangements with family members or friends and would not need support.
- Higher Education Bursary (HEB) of £2,000.00, usually paid in instalments of £666.67 over the three academic years of university
- Support to make an application to Student Finance England for tuition and maintenance loans.
- A Graduation Fund of £1000 towards the cost of gown hire, graduation photos, mortar, and so forth when graduating from university.

The support provided to young people at university was very much the support provided to young people who leave care to reside within the community.

42/20 Update from EMPIRE and Foster Carers

EMPIRE

The Panel learned that EMPIRE received a personal achievement by being shortlisted for the Children and Young People's Services Awards as the 2020 finalists. This was a very big achievement for EMPIRE who were proud about their journey. The Chair acknowledged the fantastic work from EMPIRE, which was a testament to their work and involvement at the Corporate Parenting Panel.

FOSTER CARERS

The Chair of Foster Carers provided an update to report how foster carers managed during the pandemic and national lockdown. The Panel heard that since the pandemic and national lockdown, foster carers had experienced difficulty in maintaining the upkeep on the looked after children's education. On behalf of the foster carers, they commended the support from Virtual School with providing laptops and ensuring that every child was able to access work online. It was acknowledged that some vulnerable children could not attend school which affected their mental health as well as other matters. Foster carers had described the challenging time for them and the foster children, as visits from social workers had stopped.

Further light was shared on the notion that foster carers became teachers overnight as a result of this, and supporting children looked after with schoolwork, homework, virtual lessons, teaching various subjects in order to assist and encourage the children and other requests made by social workers and schools on a daily basis.

It was said that the excellent school report by Virtual School was due to the commitment and dedication made by foster carers.

Foster carers also highlighted during annual reviews that there was often negative and unhelpful comments left unchallenged by managers.

Foster carers also shared that there was growth in positive relationships between foster carers and looked after children during the pandemic and national lockdown.

Officers in response have commended the hard work by foster carers during the pandemic and national lockdown to support looked after children by focusing on education and the balancing with other talents that young people were engaged in. Additionally, officers acknowledged the complaints made by foster carers and had requested to look into the matter further.

The Chair had requested for examples of the kind of the learning from the first national lockdown versus the second national lockdown to review the support carers had, particularly around the element of being a teacher, and to know what the service was doing to support carers in the most difficult tasks in teaching children.

A Member of EMPIRE empathised with the foster carer's role in supporting children, and having a relationship with their foster child and the service, and shared their personal experience in living in foster care. The young person further highlighted that children would make mistakes and would have to learn from their mistakes to minimise rebellion. Another Member of EMPIRE shared that the routine in the household had disrupted, which made things difficult during the national lockdown.

A Member of the Panel acknowledged the feelings expressed by foster carers and enquired of a possible change in the relationship between foster parents and the departments, where it was possible that the service did not meet their needs the way they should have done, which needed to be reviewed more closely. It was further suggested that a direct summary from foster carers detailing their unhappiness was to be reported to the Panel. The Chair requested for a direct summary and reflection to come from a wider range of foster carers for the Panel to hear, in addition to receive the voices of young people who also struggled and found it difficult during the national lockdown; in contrast, to also receive a positive summary of cases that had a positive effect.

43/20 Engagement, Achievement and Complaints Report

Officers spoke to the report of engagement, achievement and complaints. In summary, EMPIRE had offered seventy-two online activity sessions during the summer months in the pandemic and national lockdown, which was a

great achievement. There had been 300 virtual sessions since the national lockdown had started.

A Member of EMPIRE shared that EMPIRE had done a lot for the young people as the word has been out and more people had been able to attend, for more work EMPIRE could do. It was also good to have online groups and people to talk to as it was a difficult time during lockdown.

Another Member of EMPIRE shared that they had been with EMPIRE since 13 years old and was now 16 years old, and EMPIRE provided a lot for young people, they also helped with their mental wellbeing. They shared that staff would go out of their way to support and advice any query given, and through this the young person's confidence had grown and they had met lots of friends.

In review of complaints, officers informed that young people (and others) would represent their views, and learned that the majority of the complaints were in regards to housing and also communication with personal advisors and social workers. The complaints had helped better the housing and accommodation options for young care leavers. Staff was also working closely with other services to be able to deal with complaints before they become complaints and the response had improved.

With reference to the opportunities for care leavers, the number of young people in education, training and employment had remained at 62% which was not good enough as officers had greater aspirations for the children in Croydon. Officers further informed that the new local offer was scheduled to be published. The local officer provided opportunities and apprentices for young people.

The Panel was introduced by the Young Director, Deputy Young Director and the Youth Work Apprentice who addressed their roles and highlighted that the voices young people would be embedded into any policy development within social care education, care leavers in poverty and other areas.

Panel Members discussed the reports and queried on the complaints. They enquired the fifty-four number of complaints received and how many had satisfactory received a good result for the foster carer or young person at the end of the process. Additionally, whether Legacy played a role in support to young people during the pandemic and national lockdown. Officers informed that specific complaints have been reviewed. There were very few complaints by foster carers, the majority were from care leavers. Very few complaints was in stage 2, which would resolve the matter to satisfactory. They added that most complaints were around financial savings to when they were in foster care, though a lot of the past issues were being resolved. Officers further advised that they were reviewing ways to improve the immediate communications and how the service could resolve matters at an earliest opportunity to improve practise and deal with complaints. In regards to Legacy, officers informed that they had closed during the pandemic and national lockdown. However, Legacy engaged with the schools within the

local area to ensure food was provided to families. Legacy also worked closely with charities and with the schools in vicinity of Legacy to ensure that they had support and outreach support. Workers made contact with the young people using the platforms available to ensure discussions of mental health and social wellbeing was also met. Legacy was now up and running.

The Panel Co-optee foster carer representative raised a question relating to the next step and future plans and the role and influence of a personal advisor for young people aged 18 plus, which was connected with pathway plans, and queried whether the personal advisor should be involved with the pathway plans from the start; and further requesting information on the procedure to the Staying Put policy. Officers informed that they hoped for the young people to have a successful transition to an adult; Staying Put was therefore to be available to all young people. The services had provided all updates of Staying Put to foster carers and would continue to provide updates following the redrafting of the procedures, which was out for consultation. The aim was to improve Staying Put for more carers and young people to take up. Officers shared that historically personal advisors were not introduced to a young person until the eve of their 18th birthday, however, officers also took the view that an early involvement of a personal advisor alongside a social worker would assist better future planning around their education, training and employment, Staying Put and other important matters. A personal advisor was to remain with the young person post 18 years old.

Panel Members further commented on complaints and issues of communication which had been a consistent complaint for many years. Officers informed that the service had reviewed how to handle complaints, and had proposed meeting with advocates at a much earlier stage to prevent and reduce the gap from when a young person (over the age of 18) was becoming unhappy with the service. Services had pushed to ensure essential communication took place and that young people and advocates were spoken with. Complaints was welcomed within the service to review how the service responded to complaints and improve practice. In reflection fifty-six complaints was a low number in comparison to the volume of children and young people supported by the service.

The Chair thanked officers for their report.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to:

- 1.1 To note the achievements and successes of LAC children, complaints that LAC children have made and what has been done about it, and also what the leaving opportunities are/have been for care leavers.
- 1.2 And to note the welcome of the YP on board.

44/20 Exam Results, Exclusion and SEN

Officers spoke to the report, and in summary shared with the Panel the experiences young people had during the pandemic and national lockdown, which provided both challenging and positive recognition. Virtual School did very well to support children at home and to ensure every child had a personal advisor during the time.

Virtual School was ranked second nationally in the progress for Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 (KS4). The KS4 outcome was similar to last year, though results were still pending. There was detailed information within the report on children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in KS4. Officers shared that this new cohort secured education, health and care plans for three students and as a result the Virtual School intervened and worked closely with the SEND service to ensure the right support was provided. Virtual School had also provided support to families, children and to schools in order to support young people.

The Panel Co-optee foster carer representative commented on the fixed term exclusions and noted that with the data provided had no comparisons to national exams and exclusions. Officers informed that the service did not often receive national comparisons from others. The information provided was only from Croydon internal data.

Panel Members shared concerns for the 8% of children that had achieved five GCSEs including English and maths, which was seen a very low number, though advised that the data was good. Officers informed that the figures were low nationally as it was 7%, however, though Croydon's children were a percentage above, it was recognised that this was a continued area of focus and improvement around KS4 achievements. Upon reviewing the cohort of children: a percentage were unaccompanied asylum seeking children who did not take the exams, some children was not part of the cohort that counted against them, and some children would not necessarily take GCSEs; officers acknowledged that the children needed to do better, this included PEPs, children's attendance and the focus on KS4 to ensure better outcomes.

Supplementary, Panel Members enquired on the numbers of local children taking exams and not taking exams. Officers shared that the detail to these statistics were included within the Virtual School Annual Report, which was published at the previous meeting, however noted that other challenges in the statistics included a late arrival into care just before taking GCSEs or A Levels, which could impact on the results and the context behind the data to what was reviewed.

The Chair informed that there were aspirations from Panel Members with how as corporate parents they could support more young people in particular with care leavers into further education, and thus was useful to have data on whether the gap was widening or closing on young people who move on to college and further education.

Panel Members further commented on the excellent dashboard to social care issues, but queried in relation to educational issues, and officers informed that there was an education database that specifically observed looked after children, and acknowledged that the granular detail to such matters was also important to note.

Other Panel Members noted that there was a great number of looked after children unaccompanied asylum seeking children with no formal education. Officers informed that there were examples of strong advancement from students who achieved exceptional exam results to progress to Cambridge University and it was important to highlight and celebrate achievements which was often missed in comparison. Virtual School had a responsibility to educate all children looked after to ensure basic skills were met before entering mainstream school.

Further comments from the Panel included that resources was important and also how the service encouraged and motivated to put in the right resources to help young people seek their aspirations.

The Chair acknowledged the desire and commitment as corporate parents to recognise that every child was different and that as the service would continue to aspire, support and deliver not only care but educational support in line with Virtual School.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report.

45/20 Children In Care Performance Scorecard

Officers briefly shared that the performance was lower, though improving.

46/20 Initial Health Assessment and Review Health Assessment Report

Officers spoke to the report of the health assessments and in summary informed the Panel that the initial health assessments was arranged when a child first came into care which would need to be delivered within ten to twenty days. It was recorded that 65% of the initial health assessment was delivered within that time period. The review health assessment would be held every six months if the child was under the age of five and every year if the child was over the age of five. The performance figures had fluctuated, though between 79% and 90% of this assessment was delivered within the set turnaround time. With the process and the performance figures to date addressed in detail within the report, officers further mentioned that they were working closely with other services to deliver partnership achievements in ensuing each child was in receipt of their health assessment within good time. There was a number of improvements set in place to ensure better deliverance.

A Member of EMPIRE raised a question of concern around the coronavirus and the use of turmeric and how this may impact the health of those within society, and acknowledged healthy way of living would help reduce hospital visits. The specialist health officer was able to advise the Panel in response that turmeric was useful for antioxidant and anti-inflammatory. Being able to promote good health and well-being, the specialist officer informed that such discussion was welcomed in holistic health assessments to discuss not only good nutrition, but also exercise and maintaining healthy. With the concern around the coronavirus, the specialist officer advised that the medical experts were also new to the recent discovery of the new virus and was doing all that they could to understand its existence having conducting various research in the virus and a vaccination so correct information could be shared to the community. It was important that information provided was truthful and appropriate to reassure anxious views. The Chair added that Legacy, under the leadership of the Deputy and Young Mayor, had delivered a piece of work around the coronavirus to promote young people to eat healthy, look after their health and promote further messages received nationally and by the Director of Public Health.

Panel Members queried on why there were low numbers of health assessments completed within time (which was addressed within the performance scorecard report), noting that the percentage achieved within twenty days was variable but not near the 95% target, when there were lower entries of children entering care and a reduction in the number of children in care. Officers described the difficulty around this and highlighted a few challenges, which included young people declined or would not make appointments, or receiving a late referral for an initial health assessment from Children's Social Care. Officers had acknowledged the factors addressed was crucial for improvement and was working hard to improve the whole pathway, which included the referral time and passing information to health colleagues to complete assessments, though it was noted that the numbers of assessments were improving as they were tracked every week. Specialist officers further informed the Panel that on months where dips were detected within the data, there was a higher proportion of children placed out of the Croydon borough, and therefore responsibility would fall on the receiving local authority borough the child resided in, to complete the assessments. There was further discussion around virtual assessments, and officers informed that during the pandemic and national lockdown, a high percentage of assessments was completed virtually. Officers were also able to capture data on the percentage of children that had refused assessments before, and assessments that was out of date, which had now been completed virtually following engagement from the young people. Conducting assessments virtually or by telephone consultation was also often difficult to identify potential health issues, which was not obvious face-to-face. Officers concluded that face-to-face assessments had returned as children were back in school and appointments were made convenient for both foster carers and young people.

At 7:05pm EMPIRE left the meeting.

Officers further clarified on the query that referrals were often not forwarded to the health workers on time, and the Panel learned that an assessment cannot be completed without consent from the parent of the child. Though this had caused delay in the past between services, consent was a requirement for an assessment to be completed. The Chair acknowledged the challenges around consent and questioned upon reflection how the service was able to access young people who were not able to be contacted before, and if virtual engagement played a part. Health officers noticed an increase of referrals were received for mother and baby placements, as due to the pandemic and national lockdown this had impacted on new parents' access to health visitors in the first few weeks for support. Officers provided support and used different platforms to communicate and not just by telephone. With different technology available it helped services contact the young people who had declined before and were not available during the appointment, and as they were not currently within school environment were more accessible.

The Panel Co-optee foster carer representative welcomed the notion of the health passports and wanted to ensure that all children were in receipt of it; and also queried on the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children entering into care. Officers clarified that numbers of the unaccompanied asylum seeking children coming into care was on average nine children per month, however, since the pandemic and national lockdown, the average was three and a half per month. Officers informed that the health passports was a project which went live in August with thirty-four health passports delivered. Health passports were for leaving care children only.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to:

- 1.1 Note the performance of the initial and review health assessments and the actions that have been undertaken to reduce the risks associated with delivering the statutory assessments.

47/20 Update on Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Offer for Children Looked After

Officers spoke to the report and in summary shared that the service's remit was to commission health services around emotional well-being and mental health, from online support to tier two support and specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) provision.

Officers shared that all referrals were received through the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) Team in children services, and there had been an increase of the referrals due to the pandemic and national lockdown. Support was provided following triage and reviewed by the CAMHS specialist who would decide where the best support could be provided to the young person or intervention for treatment. This included Off The Record, NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) who would provide support service to those sexual assaulted and abused and SLAM CAMHS services.

During the pandemic and national lockdown, the service had increased their online presence for emotional wellbeing support, The service commissioned Kooth which offered free online support including peer support, anonymous chats and young people could also talk with a psychologist. Off The record and Drop In services both offered online counselling and virtual sessions.

The service had just under £500,000 pounds invested for children's and young people mental health across a range of different areas, this looked further into transition from children's and adults services to key transition stages. The service invested in locality workers to have named workers within specific geographical areas in the borough; the service had also increased offer in education, health care plans and crisis care during the difficult times.

Panel Members commented on the number of referrals received and queried how many referrals became active cases in comparison to the numbers referred. Though officers did not have the detail in numbers at hand, they advised that support provided to those referred had increased as the referrals were channelled through the SPOC team, therefore even if a referral requested low level intervention, the individual would still be signposted to a service to support those needs; no referral should be rejected, unless the referral was incorrectly completed for Early Help intervention instead of a mental health specific service.

Panel Members welcomed the additional investment and additional number of workers that had been provided, and requested further information on whether any of the additional services had specific specialism in autism and also requested information on the progress of the introduction of a new diagnostic pathway in respect of autism and neurological issues. Officers advised that there was an additional investment into neuro developmental service within CAMHS who would be supporting on autism spectrum disorder (ASD) assessments through the education health care plan process and an ASD assessment CAMHS. In regards to the ASD and ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) pathway and review for the diagnosis and assessment, officers shared that they were at the signing off stage, and thus no decision had been made for the long term restructuring of the model. It was not known whether the progress of improvement be impeded by the financial challenges Croydon Council was facing in terms of funding, though the decisions should not be affected.

There were comments from the Young Director regarding whether there was a time period for the engagement of supported service given to a young person, and also enquired on the policy around serious case reviews towards the deterioration of a young person's mental health. Officers informed that a young person should be able to engage with the supported services for as long as the individual required, though the level of intervention may change if necessary, for example, if the specific treatment or intervention had not provided a better outcome, an alternative intervention may be tried, or a stepped down approach to an original intervention for continued support may be proposed. With regards to young people at a crisis level, there were frequently missed opportunities where a young person required more intense

support than what was offered, however, though there were no serious cases reviews as such, officers acknowledged that early intervention with supported services for a young person was essential to prevent crisis level and the gap.

In response to a question raised by a Member of EMPIRE enquiring on how the service responded to emotional wellbeing needs of young people and what support was offered, officers informed that they had enforced a more responsive service approach that met the needs to a young person and family. The service had developed an in-house clinical service that had a number of trained clinical therapists who would work alongside social workers, families, young people and their networks to prevent young people becoming very unwell leading to unfortunate matters. By this, officers had decommissioned the CAMHS budget to put towards the in-house service where they would conduct visits at school or home. The in-house service recognised that mental health required early intervention and support where there were high risk concern, thus the individual and their networks would receive support from the in-house service in addition to other supported service such as Off The Record, Croydon Drop In, NSPCC and CAMHS, and there was no timespan on the service provided to young people and families. The in-house service had so far completed 442 consultations and had undertaken 190 therapy sessions, which had all taken place within the community. A lot of work was also being done with foster carers to support those managing young people who may be unaccompanied asylum seeking children who may have experienced trauma in their own homes. Support to foster carers would include how these could be identified early and what their needs were, and also how the foster carer themselves be supported as mental health often made people very worried and very fearful leading to anxiety, lack of confidence, as they struggle to know how best to support young people; and thus the service was creating infrastructures within the organisation to support those that required support. Officers further informed that two mental health workers had been appointed from the grant received from Department for Education who worked directly with young people doing direct work with frail emotion mental health. They had also completed training to provide peer support to those with low emotional health.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report.

48/20 Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2019-2020

Officers spoke to the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report which included all statistical information of the children looked after care leavers and information about their health and wellbeing, education and achievement whilst in 2019 and 2020. Other significant events included: the adoption service, which had moved to the Adopt London South Service thus Croydon no longer operated as an adoptive service; staff stability; and also the successful Ofsted inspection.

The Panel welcomed the detailed report and noted that as corporate parents the Panel needed to challenge the service more and engage in a better way

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to reflect the report as they may be deemed passive, subsequently, the Panel noted that they involved young people to directly voice their concerns to the Corporate Parenting Panel and with their voices heard this had given the Panel the opportunity to directly challenge officers in an open and transparent form.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report. This report was to be taken to Council in December.

At 8:01pm Councillor Shafi Khan left the meeting.

49/20 How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?

The Panel was asked to reflect on how they as corporate parents could challenge services and be less passive as a Panel.

50/20 Exclusion of the Press and Public

This was not required.

The meeting ended at 8.12 pm

Signed:

Date:

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Corporate Parenting Panel

Meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel held on Thursday, 10 December 2020 at 5.00pm.
This was held virtually.

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Alisa Flemming (Chair);

Councillors Shafi Khan, Bernadette Khan, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Maria Gatland and Helen Redfern

Co-optee Members

Virtual School: Shelley Davies, Angela Griffiths

Care Leaver Representative; Ashleigh Searle

Foster Carer Representatives: Angela Christmas, Manny Kwamin (Interim Chair)

Health Commissioners: Pasquale Brammer

Also

Present: Nick Pendry (Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care)
Rodica Cobarzan (Head of Service - Social Work with Children Looked After and Carer Leavers)
Mick McCarthy (Service Manager)
Adam Fearon-Stanley (Service Manager)
Paul Williamson (Strategic Programme Lead)
David Garland (Lead Commissioner)
Thomas Joyce (Young Engagement Worker)Shaun Hanks
Debbie Jones (Director of Children's Social Services)

Apologies: Co-optee Members: EMPIRE, Sarah Bailey and Dr Julia Simpson;
Apologies for lateness from Councillor Shafi Khan.

PART A

51/20 Disclosures of interest

There were none.

52/20 Urgent Business (if any)

There was none.

53/20 Update on actions agreed at previous meeting(s)

There were no actions from the last meeting.

54/20 Children in Care Performance Scorecard

Officers spoke to the performance scorecard and in summary highlighted that in care proceedings less children were entering care in comparison to the previous year. Though the number of looked after children was still high with 78/10000 child population comparison to the national average which is 65/10000 child population, the service had been working with children returning safely home with support.

The red indicators on the scorecard highlighted the care planning and participation which was deemed lower and one that required improvement. Since November 2020, there had been changes in staffing and in performance.

Panel Members discussed the scorecard.

Councillor Shafi Khan arrived at the meeting at 5:27pm

In response to a question raised by the Panel Co-optee foster carers' representative, regarding the process and expectation of looked after children returning home, officers informed that there was a statutory responsibility to review if any child in care could safely return home. During statutory children looked after reviews for each looked after child, the services involved were present and the child circumstances considered. What was essential was to consider if the parents had made sufficient changes since the child was initially removed to consider safe rehabilitation. The foster carer representative had a follow up question seeking clarification on the involvement of foster carer's advocacy for the looked after children they looked after, as foster carers had not been involved with or understood the process and was often informed of change of circumstance when a child was returning home. Officers responded that social workers had a statutory responsibility to review the care plan and foster carers were part of a child review so they should be aware of plans and their views heard.

The officers talked about circumstances in which parents may request an immediate return home; if accommodation was provided under a section 20 (voluntary sending children into care) and a parent requested for their child to return home, the service cannot prevent the request unless there was an immediate risk.

A section 20 under the Children Act 1989 was a voluntary agreement by the parent. This meant the Local Authority would need to undertake an assessment and provide support after a child returned home if a parent would not agree to a planned return.

The foster care representative further enquired about whether section 20 was a danger to children in care aged 15 years as court proceedings did not often go ahead. Officers responded that Croydon Children's Service had been trying to make positive use of section 20 and ensure works in partnership with families, rather than having orders. It was rare when section 20 did not work as intended.

The Panel Co-optee care leaver representative commented on section 20 and 15 year olds, indicating that consideration needed to be given to young people on section 20 who were returning home, against their wishes but at their parents' request, may suffer. She further informed that it was very important for services to not get complacent on an agreement due to parents or due to a young person's age.

It was noted that there were lower homelessness since the pandemic and national lockdown, and there needed to be a hard offer of early help; though with the change within the Early Help service there was concerns that support was required for young people and the impact on families going forward. Officers responded that there was reductions within the Early Help service and acknowledged that children and families in need was the focus, though children entering care was a lot less due to the pandemic and national lockdown.

Comments were raised by Panel Members that foster carers experiences should be acknowledged as they worked with children every day and also understood the legislation. It was important that foster carers were fully engaged and involved and had their voices heard as it would strengthen the concept of working together. The Chair noted and highlighted to the Panel that the involvement of foster carers was also part of their improvement plan.

Panel Members welcomed the great improvement to the scorecard, though it was recognised that the red indicators was consistent and asked officers how this could turnaround. Officers recognised that the service was not always converting care plans into a pathway plan in a timely manner, and that it was a priority to the service. Currently the service had an 84% completion rate.

The Chair noted that the pathway plan was also a priority to the annual Corporate Parenting Panel.

55/20 Children's Social Care Placement Sufficiency

Officers spoke to the report and in summary, highlighted that the borough had a sufficiency plan around looked after children after accommodation and the plan is from 2019 to 2021.

The service was in process to develop an accommodation strategy that provided sustainable high quality and value for money accommodation provision. It was noted that there was still a number of key decisions to be made in light of the market situation, current commissioning arrangements and practice improvement in addition to the current section 114. Some accommodation placements challenges faced included emergency placements where accommodation was provided on the basis of best available rather than better matching process to meet the needs of the young people; some residential placements have been placed further than twenty miles away, out of the borough and even further away from their birth family.

Officers effectively were promoting Staying Put as the best option for young people, and also to find financial sustainable accommodation options for the council and commission used but would also be appropriate for care leavers and young people when they reached that appropriate age and working along neighbouring services – leaving care, adults services and housing.

Officers shared ongoing work with leaving care, housing and finance to ensure demand for future commissioning and this was in line with the wider supported housing strategy. This work was being led by the Adult Social Care. Tenancy and financial management training both internal offering within the Council, and potential external charities were other options. Work was also being held with the housing team around issues for care leavers in the private rented sector. There was also work with the transition service to support the care leavers who had extra needs or fits into the vulnerable adult's category.

The Panel Co-optee care leaver representative was congratulated by all Members of the Panel and officers for her work in "All About Me" project.

Panel Members commented on the report.

One Panel Member raised a point that the report noted radical change of models alongside the South London Commissioning Programme, and was concerned that there was no acknowledgement of the radical change of delivery to the wider administration Member group, which had financial implications and how it would provide greater opportunity for children. There was a request to learn more and what the risks entailed. The Chair made note that the placement sufficiency report was to be heard at this Panel to address sufficiency around Children's Social Care, for example Staying Put, and thus there were no new models. Officers clarified in response to Member's concern that the radical changes focused on the action in improving quality and sufficiency.

The foster carer representative commented in relation to Staying Put that it would seem that foster carers were often consulted, though this was not the case and that there was a gap between Staying Put and the Shared Lives provision. Officers acknowledged the continued issue that required further attention between Staying Put and Shared Lives. The criteria for a Shared Lives arrangement was more than having a successful Care Act assessment that entitled them to that provision, thus in order for a Shared Lives arrangement to happen, adult services or the transition team needed to first carry out a character assessment to ensure the young person was entitled to services under the Care Act, and if so whether there was duty within that act to provide accommodation Shared Lives should be recommended if appropriate for them. Further, officers informed that there was progression for a revision of the service's Staying Put policy to be compared to other local authorities. The foster care representative requested for clarification following the review of Staying Put in 2018; foster carers were advised that they would no longer be classed as a foster carer at this time. Officers confirmed that this assertion was incorrect and that foster carers would remain on the register if

they had no looked after child within their household, further, foster carers was encouraged no not deregister.

Another Panel Member noted that more needed to be done to achieve goals though this implemented more costs, and wondered whether the service could achieve its required goal with a reduced budget. It was also pointed out that in semi-independent homes, the vast majority was male and queried whether single-sexed accommodation was available, guaranteed, or whether there was simply no choice for females. In response, officers informed that the service was working very hard with children under 18 years old, and unfortunately there was a high number of girls in placements, approximately a 40:60 split. Officers shared that the service used semi-independent support accommodation when there were no other options. There was very little match ability and the service needed to improve in better placed matching. Officers acknowledged the gap in providing support to vulnerable girls and were looking for the best cost efficient service. Further, it was clarified that foster carers were paid by Croydon Council and the housing benefits were paid back. The Chair questioned whether semi-independent homes was available to just Croydon children or extended for cross-borough use, however this was not known by officers. The care leaver representative informed the Panel that was important to also review the pros and cons sustaining single-sexed accommodation which could also be deemed a risk.

Further comments by the care leaver representative informed that young people were not previously involved in strategies and processes, and with the voices of young people heard this shaped Croydon Services, and was thankful for the changes.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to:

- 1.1 To note the progress and current action plan associated with the Council's Sufficiency Plan 2019-2021.

56/20 Update on the South London Commissioning Programme

Officers spoke to the report sharing with the Panel that the South London Commissioning Programme was established in 2013. The role of the programme was to help coordinate special educational need and disability (SEND). In 2017, Croydon became the lead borough to allow a multi-borough framework for independent residency. The Approved Provider Panel Agreement (APPA) framework showed an opportunity to work collaborate. With seven boroughs involved, there had also been cost challenges. Further, officers shared that they were currently in the middle of an evaluation.

The All About Me Project showed key benefits and trends as the hosted borough. This project was created with 250 young people, a profile for young people to have a voice in the referral process. From interests and hobbies and so forth, the young people were aged between 6 and 18 years old. Other local authorities like Sutton and Bexley had also used the All About Me for social work practice. The project had received Ofsted recognition approval from the

department of education. There was other engagement in other areas such as fostering, retention, recruitment, video storytelling, equality and diversity and inclusion.

Panel Members requested for further insight on the budgeting of the organisation on the commission for the South London Commissioning Programme and services meeting particular groups; also further details to cultural and individual heritage. Officers responded highlighting that the All About Me project provided individual heritage and culture. With regards to rates, it was noted that more was asked for less. Officers hoped that the tender providers would pay the tendon living wage, if based in London, as a minimum.

The Chair praised and thanked the team for carrying out such an extraordinary programme and project that had successfully been recognised and valued in other boroughs.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to:

- 1.1 To note the progress of the South London Commissioning Programme and the strategic priorities of the programme for 2021-24.

57/20 Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report

Officers spoke to Independence Review Officer (IRO) Annual report and in summary, highlighted that the service had received feedback from a Ofsted Monitoring visit in October 2019 and a peer review by the improvement partners in Camden whom identified a need to improve the 'Footprint' of the IRO service in challenging and monitoring care planning. To update, the footprint had increased dramatically where the midway reviews had almost doubled from 300 to 700 and case notes that reflected direct contact with children and parents or colleagues outside CLA reviews were normally 600 a month and embedded in a number of different practice forums which offers the opportunities to express children's views and professional views.

Children and parents had been more involved with the service as young children were increasingly being contacted by IROs before and after meetings. Following the pandemic and national lockdown restrictions, the service had to result to using different platforms to communicate with their young person which the service did remarkable quickly and the children continued to have their reviews uninterrupted in the same frequency as before the pandemic.

Participation was recognised as an area that needed to improve.

Panel Members commented on the report.

The Panel Co-optee foster carer representative made a comment addressing that during the pandemic and national lockdown, the older looked after children were happier to use the Microsoft Teams for virtual meetings and

communication with their key workers from home. Foster carers also found that reviews were better run online than in person. Officers recognised the use of virtual meetings and was proud that the logistics moving to fifty meetings a week to facilitate all organisation was proceeding well in comparison to other local authorities.

Panel Members commented on the care plans and the drift and delay, and noted that the IRO had a duty to prevent and challenge conforming drift and delay. Officers responded with regards to the quality of plans that the IRO would prepare reviews to discuss plans, this was known as the mid-year review, and this was highlighted face-to-face. IRO would access decisions, change in placement, stepping down, coming in care, and they attended panel meetings where these measures were discussed and challenged.

Panel Members credited the good report presented to the Panel, which was child centred and commended on the good service. The thorough report was further accredited by the Chair.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report.

58/20 How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?

Comments from the Panel included:

- Work taken with the commissioning around placement and work developed across the borough regarding developing sufficiency at home and wider discussion of children homes, which has been really good.
- Improvement in accommodation.
- Work led by the Care Leavers Representative – the All About Me project, as it got to a place where there was national recognition for good work. Her contribution and work has also given young people a voice.
- Positive progress in the IRO, their real improvement and quality of service.
- The encouragement that care leavers aspire to excel
- Foster carers do not have enough information around section 20 (of the Children's Act 1989) and will need to have greater recognition to the contribution they make to the lives of young people in Croydon.
- The commitment in work and aspiration officers had put in providing good results.
- The Panel challenging officers with questions.
- Welcoming and acknowledging voices from young people, foster carers.

59/20 Work Programme

The work programme was agreed as per report.

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60/20 Exclusion of the Press and Public

This was not required.

The meeting ended at 7.53 pm

Signed:

Date: