

Corporate Parenting Panel

Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on Wednesday, 3 March 2021 at 5.01pm.
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

Angela Christmas (Foster Carer Representative),
Manny Kwamin (Foster Carer Representative),
Shelley Davies (Virtual School),
Sarah Bailey (Virtual School),
Dr Julia Simpson (LAC Nurse/Doctor)
Ashleigh Searle (Care Leaver Representative)
Pasquale Brammer (Health Commissioner)
Roneeta Campbell-Butler (Health Commissioner)

Also

Present:

Debbie Jones (Executive Director Children, Young People & Education)
David Garland (Lead Commissioner, Commissioning and Procurement)
Roisin Madden (Interim Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care)
Hannah Doughty (Head of Adolescent Services, Early Help and Childrens Social Care)
Sherry Copping (Interim Service Manager, Early Help and Childrens Social Care)
Nana Bonsu (Head of Service for Systemic Clinical Practice at the Adolescence Service and Workforce Development)
Sarah Lawton (Interim Head of Temporary Accommodation & Service Development)
Veronika Yavricheva (Young Director)

Apologies: EMPIRE and Council Staff

PART A

12/21 Minutes of the previous meeting

There was no available minutes published for the Panel to review.

13/21 Disclosures of interest

There were none.

14/21 Urgent Business (if any)

There was none.

15/21 Update on actions agreed at previous meeting(s)

There were no actions.

16/21 Children in Care Performance Scorecard

The Corporate Parenting Panel considered the Children in Care Performance Scorecard which provided an overview of the August month. The Panel received an overview from the Interim Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care, Roisin Madden, and the Head of Adolescent Services, Early Help and Children's Social Care, Hannah Doughty, who highlighted the following red key performance indicators:

- *The children who had an up-to-date care plan and an up-to-date pathway plan.* The plans were to be updated every six or twelve months according to their need, however, the January performances had a low score of 74% and 70%. This had been acknowledged by senior officers who had put an improvement plan in place to support social workers in completing the documents.

In response to queries raised by the Panel, the Interim Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care and the Head of Adolescent Services, Early Help and Children's Social Care and clarified the following:

- Responsible managers had been notified of the challenges and unacceptable performance of the red indicators that had been recognised for some time, and weekly meetings had been put in place to focus better performance and improving actions.
- An affirmative action approach and a contingency plan was to be taken to address the concern around the unaccompanied asylum seeking children care and pathway plans. It was recognised that this was an area the service had struggled for some time and needed more improvement. There were teams that had better performance than others, concluding for a better planning approach to improve the levels of practice and performance.
- It was agreed that the council did not have full control within the red key indicator relating to the number of young people that were not in employment, education and training, and though there was limited control, the global pandemic had impacted the availability of employment, training and volunteering opportunities. The service needed to utilise and access local and national government schemes that provided support to employment within the pandemic recovery phase, and support from the whole council would aid better support to raise the performance score of 58% to a more satisfactory mark.

- The Care Leaver Representative addressed the importance of the issues not recorded within the 58% and that affected young children to not be in education or employment. Unsustainable accommodation was deemed a factor for example finding living costs would be claimed through universal credit, and therefore it was important to review the cause for why a young person would not complete pathways or remained in education. It was also highlighted that the South London Commissioning Programme had submitted a health inequalities bid for young people with mental health needs, social emotional needs and those struggling to get into education, employment or training for supported work to commence; further, the service proposed to support care leavers in apprenticeships within the council expanding opportunities in different sectors and not based around lived experiences. The Chair added that there was aspirations for apprenticeships to expand providing more opportunities for young people to work in other sectors for sustainability and provide young people with long-term training, which may suit young people who did not want to take a long routed course.
- Officers noted that there was an area for improvement within the suitability of accommodation for young people, their involvement in choices and what their options were, also the transition in moving to adulthood. The work the commissioning team were now undertaking had insight to what the young people had addressed.
- There was further discussion relating to the Staying Put policy and the concerns raised that the policy did not recognise young people with special needs living in independent accommodation. Comments highlighted that the policy was generalised. Officers addressed that the Staying Put policy had its complexities and there was a review to provide flexibility.

ACTION – The Chair recommended for available data of neighbouring authorities or good practice to benchmark employment, education and training to be provided in the future meeting.

RECOMMENDATION: To review the Staying Put policy and ensure it incorporates young people with additional needs living in an independent accommodation, which would be fed into the SEN Strategy Board.

17/21 Care Leavers and Support for Care Leavers - Care Leavers' Local Offer

The Corporate Parenting Panel considered the Care Leavers and Support for Care Leavers & Care Leavers' Local Offer which described the current position regarding the levels of support for care leavers in the key areas of housing; education, training and employment; health; involvement and the transition from being a looked after child to young adulthood. The report also referred to the revised local offer and the new Care Leavers' financial policy and guidance. The Panel received an overview from the Head of Adolescent Services, Early Help and Children's Social Care, Hannah Doughty.

It was highlighted that the total of young people being supported in Children's Services had reduced from 848 in March 2020 to 765 in January 2021.

Officers noticed a dramatic rise in numbers due to the implementations of the Children's Social Work Act 2018. The service had reviewed the numbers and noted the high numbers of care leavers opened to the service and not in need of support at that time. The service had reviewed this and contacted those care leavers to provide them with information that they required should they be in need of support. The service was also moving towards a joint allocation of a social worker and a personal advisor for young people from the age of 15 and a half years.

Officers informed Panel Members that there were 56% of care leavers who were former unaccompanied children, of which two thirds were male.

The current voluntary arrangement was for each local authority to accept up to 0.07% of the child population that was unaccompanied asylum seeking children, which meant sixty-six children for Croydon Children's Social Care, though currently the service supported two-hundred and ten children due to the location of the home office – Luna House in Croydon.

There were fifty social workers who were trained to conduct the human rights assessments to determine whether, young people had their appeal rights exhausted and had no legal right to remain in the UK, and, to continue to receive support through the service. It was said that should the assessment state otherwise, the unaccompanied children would return to the Home Office for support in accommodation and charities which repatriation was considered. Currently there was approximately sixty-five young person ages 21 – 25 who had status, which gained an average cost of £11,500 per annum to service per child.

Officers further informed with regards to housing that more work was required around the housing offer to care leavers. Currently the majority of young people resided in private sector accommodation which was secured by housing. All care leavers would be offered accommodation upon their 18th birthday which would be within their assessment and heard at the housing panel. Young people with no recourse to public funds would be offered shared accommodation. The cost to children's services for young people accommodation procured by housing was due to a surcharge of 25% of rent of each young person with recourse to public funds at the charges agreed to offset non-payment of rent, for the reason of a shortfall in housing benefit claims. Additionally, there were sixty-nine young people who were currently residing with their former foster carers under a staying put arrangement and there was more encouragement for social workers to consider the staying put policy as a preferred first step towards independence.

Lastly, officers highlighted the local offer for care leavers and also work that the service had in place for care leavers which included a championship scheme, education, training and employment and the transition from children looked after to leaving care services.

The Panel welcomed the report which was very informative and the proposals put forward, and commented on what was presented to them within the report.

The Co-optee Member and Care Leaver Representative had asked questions with regards to whether the proposals were made at the time of the Council's financial constraints, and whether the proposals were still achievable a priority. There were also comments on the new local offer which provided an undesirable review where care leavers saw this as a directory for other services and not what care leavers were entitled to. The financial policy and guidance was not clear within the local offer, and there were other missing information such as the drive-in support. Officers responded and addressed that the proposals had been written since the financial landscape had been known, and the service had ensured that they had retained quality of service upon review which was value for money and filled their statutory obligations. Officers also noted the comments raised by EMPIRE of the design and accessibility of information of the local offer which would be reviewed and included the financial offers. Further comments referred to the previous local offer where it was directed by the young people for the young people, and it was noted that the local offer should stick to what was working to represent young person's voice and experience within that. The Co-optee Foster Carer representative informed that foster carers would be available to help support social workers as they spent more time with the young children and many had built a good relationship with them; the Foster Carers Association were also previously involved in the last local offer. Members welcomed the idea for the local offer to be more user friendly.

Panel Members had put forward their concerns relating to whether the service was able to deliver within the financial difficulties the Council was under. Further with regards to affordable housing, officers informed that there was a quota as part of the allocation scheme, and Croydon had nomination rights intending to use the local housing association vacancies. Additionally, the service would often review whether there was relevant housing associations that had a separate waiting list, as this would indicate that they had their own rules on how they allocated accommodation.

Other questions from Panel Members was related to the housing costs that ranged from £600 to £1200 per month, and whether the service had influence within their purchasing power. There were also questions relating to choices being made with the council using low quality accommodation when the high quality accommodation was sat empty. Lastly questions were raised on the Staying Put arrangements, as it was noted that there was a low uptake, as Staying Put was not popular.

The Chair reminded the Panel of the commitment that was set in relation to increasing the number of council opportunities for young people to be put onto the Council register to access housing, which included some of the Brick by Brick sites; however though there was communications with senior officers within the service on the progress, there was complex issues with the Brick by Brick sites and this meant that services did not operate in the same way.

Officers informed that there were different reasons for Staying Put arrangements, which depended on the individual of the young person, the foster cares and their ability or willingness to be able to provide, or even the expectation and preparation of what would happen after leaving home. More work was to be considered around Staying Put to ensure young people considered this option. Officers also raised new information from the budget proposal where the housing cap was raised from 22 year old to 25 years old from June 2021, which meant a care leaver would get a one-bedroom accommodation rate up until their 21st birthday. This would provide security though consideration would need to be considered with those dependent on housing benefits. Officers were working with Housing to get the right arrangements in place and address issues where it would be value for money for young people (tenants) residing at the units provided.

Members were positive of the ethos of children services who engaged with young people and listening to their voices.

ACTION – To be presented with a concrete setting of the nature and extent of the dialogue and engagement with young people relating to the local offer.

The Chair thanked officers for their report.

The Panel **RESOVED** to agree the arrangements confirming the role of adult services in preparing for care leavers and the local offer and to return to the next panel.

18/21 Review of Missing Children

The Corporate Parenting Panel considered the Review of Missing Children report. The Panel received an overview from the Head of Service for Systemic Clinical Practice at the Adolescence Service and Workforce Development, Nana Bonsu.

Officers informed that there had been a 15% reduction in the number of young people reported missing from 2019 and 2020, this was due to the impact of the pandemic and lockdown; and 48% of the young people who were identified as missing in 2020 was discussed at the Complex Adolescence Panel.

Officers addressed the correlation of missing and exploitation where there was a clear connection. Of those that were missing in 2020, two thirds of young people were 16 plus year olds with the highest number being 17 year old, and further demographics highlighted 85% of those young people were from Black and Asian and other ethnic minority group backgrounds, and 75% of the young people had been subject to the Complex Adolescence Panel or MACE protocol even for child's sexual exploitation or criminal exploitation. [The MACE protocol was a multi-agency panel that reviewed matters of concern around exploitation whether it was sexual, criminal or missing to

young children.] The completion rate of return to home interviews were 71%. 60% were of young children out of borough, 64% were return home interviews, 64% were young children in semi-independent, 60% were young children in out of borough placement and 65% were local children. There was a high percentage of black Caribbean children represented in the figures related to the MACE protocol around sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation, with some hypothesis around the risk in comparison to the demographic of other ethnicities; though socio-economic factors and inequalities may be contributing factors to the higher over representation.

Officers informed the Panel of the Missing Strategy meetings and through the Performance Team, data produced repeated missing children and social workers were to ensure that they followed through with the practice guidance with regards to the Missing Strategy meetings. The importance of these meetings was to include how staff engaged the views of young people's concern that was raised and enabling best practice.

Officers noted the way missing episodes were recorded for young children in placements who may have returned home late past their curfew time without authorisation, and that this needed to be revised to reflect the missing episode as appropriate to what has been coded on record.

The Panel welcomed the report presented by officers addressing a lot of data.

The Lead Representative for Care Leavers had commented on the report in relation to ethnic disproportionality, highlighting that there was a programme on race inequalities within placements, and moving commissioned placements for children and young people, exploring work reviewing language used to describe young people and how unconscious bias training could be improved.

The Lead Foster Carer Representative commented on the report for clearer guidelines for foster carers in regards to the procedure for missing children from placements following a recent training session. For example, at what time should the foster carer allow before contact was made to the police to report a missing child. The clarity would help foster carers due diligence in their role especially if it should be a standard time or a unique time to individuals. Officers informed that there was now a grab pack to be at every placement and residential semi-independent placement which provided essential detail and agreed position of each young person with an updated photo, contact details and very clear expectation of curfew time to the individual. This was to help with due diligence and manage calls to the out of hours emergency-duty team. Further comments from the Panel was shared around the importance of developing the relationship with the young person to avoid potential risk, understanding unusual patterns of a young person, over reporting than under reporting, and having open conversations with the young person. Additionally, the Interim Director of Education highlighted the importance with the schools working together with services to help develop children's independence skills.

Further comments of communication was addressed between services for better due diligence and better conversations around the current lockdown restrictions of the pandemic to help work within the context and for clear protocol to be shared for services to improve safeguarding young people and to exercise better due diligence.

Members of the Panel commented further in relation to the out-of-hours emergency duty team and the support provided to foster carers, and officers informed that there was a duty foster care offer which provided support to foster carers for situations where they required further support in high levels of anxiety and other elements to missing children.

ACTION – Clarification on whether there was a duty foster carer for out-of-hours support to foster carers.

Members of the Panel commented on the report and addressed concern of some missing strategy meetings not taking place and asked whether meetings were missed due to the pandemic and what action had been put in place to rectify this. Officers reassured Members and the Panel that the issue of children going missing and exploitation of children, sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation has not been off the agenda, though volumes of incidents had reduced during the pandemic, there had been good work with the Metropolitan British Transport Police and local authorities to persecute offenders of organised abuse to children. Further, officers informed that there was robust tracking of missing children and there was a series of workshops and training sessions to ensure staff managers were aware of protocol and practice guidance.

The Chair shared that she received weekly missing reports that outlined any young person missing with measures and steps made to contact the individual. In these reports it was noticed that there was a reduction in numbers which was possibly due to the impact of the pandemic, and this was discussed at the Children's Improvement Board. There was the suggestion of the themed friendly document such as a storyboard of the high repeated missing young person that helped contextualise what support would be provided to the young person.

The Chair thanks officers for their report.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report and the recommendations contained within the report.

19/21 How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?

Panel Members welcomed the number of actions and recommendations in the meeting particularly around working more closely with foster carers.

Panel Members welcomed more user friendly minutes and reports.

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Panel Members welcomed involving young people more robustly in discussions about the local offer and taking it forward and considering further commissioning arrangements and establishment of outcomes; and seeing more support in respect to those young people who were not in education employment or training.

Panel Members would like the staying put work to be driven forward.

Panel Members welcomed the focus on young people and thanked Members and officers for the pieces of work shared on behalf of the young people and their involvement towards their work thus far.

20/21 Work Programme

The Work Programme was agreed as received with the inclusion for an update on the development of the internal fostering services and what the structure, target setting for the service and staffing levels to be included in the next meeting.

21/21 Exclusion of the Press and Public

This was not required.

The meeting ended at 7:30pm

Signed:

Date:

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