

Corporate Parenting Panel

Meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel held on Wednesday, 21 November 2018 at 5:06pm in F10, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon, CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Alisa Fleming Shafi Khan, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Maria Gatland and Helen Redfern

Co-optee Foster Carers: Angela Christmas, Manny Kwamin

Also

Present: Shelley Davies (Head of Education, Standards, Safeguarding and Exclusion Lead),
Fiona Mackirdy (Leaving Care Service Leader),
Phillip Segurola (Interim Director, Early Help and Children's Social Care)
Wendy Tomlinson (Head of Service for Looked After Children and Resources)
Porsha Robinson (Youth Engagement Leader)
Christopher Roach (Youth Engagement Worker)
Child F (Young Person and Member of the Children in Care Council)
Child JB (Young Person and Member of the Children in Care Council)
Emily Collinsbeare (Youth Engagement Team Manager)

Apologies: Councillors Alisa Flemming (for lateness), Janet Campbell and Maggie Henson
Co-Optees: Martin Williams (Foster Carer), Ashleigh Searle (former Care Leaver)

PART A

Prior to Councillor Flemming joining the meeting, Councillor Khan chaired the meeting.

36/17 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 5 September 2018 were agreed as an accurate record.

37/17 Disclosures of interest

Councillor Jerry Fitzpatrick disclosed that he was a member of the Adoption Panel.

38/17 Urgent Business (if any)

There were none.

39/17 **Update on actions agreed at previous meeting(s)**

There were none.

40/17 **Engagement and Achievement (Inc. Complaints and Learning Opportunities)**

Members of the Children in Care Council (CICC) attended the Panel meeting to discuss complaints and achievements.

F said that there were a number of Looked After Children (LAC) in Croydon who made complaints.

JB said that Looked After Children felt their thoughts weren't cared about. They felt that training and support for managers around communication would be good and that foster carers should communicate more with social workers. It was also reported that young people do not understand the stages of a complaint and requested the Panel visit them at the CICC.

Officers noted that as part of the Improvement Plan they would look further at how the service could improve communication with service users. It was acknowledged that there needs to be more work done to develop communications with young people.

Some Panel Co-optees shared that as foster carers, they would find themselves in situations similar to young people.

Officers from the Youth Engagement Team who were present (accompanying young children from the CICC), shared with the Panel that young people often believed that adults made complaints on their behalf.

The young people were confident in knowing how to make a complaint by talking to someone at school.

The Looked After Children Service supported children of different abilities and vulnerabilities. However not all young people in care would have the general awareness of how to make a complaint. Officers clarified that it is part of the Independent Reviewing Officer role to ask young people at their first review if they are clear how to make a complaint.

The Panel learned that many of the complaints received were from adults on behalf of the young person. For example, these adults include foster carers, advocates, parents, or from schools.

Some Panel Co-optees shared that foster carers can feel disconnected from the child. This can be a major part of the communication barrier. They also shared that it was not good to rely on the designated person at school.

Officers identified the stages of a complaint:

- (i). Stage one: All complaints would be sent to the service manager;
- (ii). Stage two: Further response would be via an independent officer if the outcome is not satisfactory;
- (iii). Stage three: There would be an independent review outside the local authority with a panel of people reviewing the complaint.

The Panel learned that when a young person was under local authority care a range of information would be provided. A 'welcome to care pack' is given. This includes how to make a complaint, information on the complaint process in addition to what it will be like residing with a foster carer.

Members of the Panel discussed that the young person should be at the heart of every complaint. Therefore it should be clear to every young person how to make a complaint and that this will be considered seriously.

Members of the Panel discussed the Star Award Ceremony. This is an event where children in care and care leavers' achievements are celebrated.. This was praised as a positive experience by Panel Members.

It was reported that the CICC has chosen that it want to be renamed and has decided that it will now be called EMPIRE (Empowering Memories Positives Inspiring Respect Education).

F and JB also highlighted their positive experiences including attending the London CICC; making friends; the Christmas Event and trip; and Robert Henderson being newly appointed as Croydon's Executive Director for Children, Families and Education.

Members of the Panel welcomed the CICC presence and the work it had achieved thus far. There was encouragement for young people to be present at future panels.

Action: For the Panel to sign the Pledge that had been developed by the Children in Care Council. This will need to be a future agenda item for the Panel.

41/17

Children in Care Performance Scorecard and Children Missing from Care

The Interim Director, Early Help and Children's Social Care, and the Head of Service for Corporate Parenting shared with the Panel the children in care performance scorecard.

Officers highlighted that there was a lot of work undertaken in September 2019. Areas where the service had done well and those requiring further improvement were noted. The good performance on placement stability was noted. The key area where improvement had been achieved was in LAC reviews. These have to be conducted within twenty-eight days of care beginning, and then every three-months thereafter.

Officers advised that there was difficulty in health and education. Performance on initial and review health assessments was noted as improving; additional nursing resource has been provided to carry out reviews. However, there continued to be challenges with initial health assessments as these require a doctor. It was the duty on the social work team to notify the health team of the need to conduct a health assessment.

Panel Co-optees who are foster carers shared that there was a definite improvement in this service as there were regular calls from nurses within a week or two of placement for arrangements to be made to complete a health assessment. Assessments are also taking place on Saturdays.

Officers noted that more work is happening to ensure that all children and young people have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) in place. This is being aided by a review of the processes being overseen by the Children's Improvement Board and better communication between teams. This had been a positive outcome which started at the beginning of the academic year.

Members of the Panel were concerned with the amount of time being taken to complete PEPs. Panel Co-optees sought to clarify the details of all the parties involved in PEP production. They were advised that the social worker, school designated officer, foster carer and the child should be in attendance at a PEP meeting and a senior leader of the Virtual School could attend upon request. This is the participation required to develop a PEP as set out in regulation.

Ofsted had seen the scorecard. Feedback from Ofsted was that it needed to be revised. The Children's Improvement Board had determined that the scorecard process will be reviewed by senior leadership with a focus on ensuring the correct allocation of resources.

Members of the Panel discussed the necessity of having legal parental consent in place for children in care to have a health assessment.

In response to the questions raised by Members of the Panel on the quality assurance of electronic PEPs, officers shared that a quality assurance officer was employed and all Virtual School officers were qualified teachers. Additionally, the Panel learned that there were a lot of PEPs being produced at the same time. Officers highlighted that quality assurance of PEPs is a focus given its role in raising standards. This is therefore subject to ongoing work.

Cllr Flemming arrived at the meeting at 6:09pm

In a separate report (the Missing Report), officers discussed the number of missing episodes and the number of children missing in September 2018.

The Panel learned that the service had young people within its care who go missing on multiple occasions. The service saw an improvement in the

number of completed Return Home Interviews (RHI) (measured at 89%). However this percentage fell for interviews conducted with children placed in another local authority.

Officers clarified the definition of a missing child.

The Panel discussed the data and numbers of missing children recorded. They learned that data was recorded in two different ways:

- (1) **Police**: it is a duty on foster carers to report a missing child. Police should then conduct an interview with the foster carer(s). Each call to the police was a record of a missing child. Members of the Panel highlighted that it would be useful to understand the reporting methods used in other local authorities; whether these are the same across all authorities or vary. Officers shared that the approach in Kent was the same as in Croydon; police in Kent dealt only with missing children and not unauthorised absence. It was highlighted that it was important to differentiate the two terms.
- (2) **the Emergency Duty Team (EDT)**: when a foster carer called the EDT, a missing alert on the children recording system would be triggered. The young person's social worker was notified as a result. The Panel Co-optees discussed that email communication had been helpful for the foster carers. Further discussion highlighted that access to information and clarity of expectations for the EDT also needed to be revised.

The Panel learned that the service triggered the missing pathway if a child was missing. During placement plan meetings the officers involved would have acknowledged the possible reasons for the young persons' unauthorised absence. Social workers would also have identify the risks associated with each child and ensure these are addressed. It was noted that these risks can change for each child overtime.

Members of the Panel asked questions about data and the process for recording absent children. The Panel also wanted to know about the safety of children once they return from a missing episode and whether this was measured. Officers highlighted that each Return Home Interview would seek responses to questions defined by the context of the missing episode and what else was known about the young person. This might include if the young person was regularly missing and risk factors such as Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), gang affiliation and illegal substance misuse. The Multi-agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) Panel would discuss individuals and specific causes of concern.

The Panel learned that within the Missing Person Team there was an analyst, who had a police background, and was responsible for mapping missing children in connection to strong gang affiliation, CSE and other types of exploitation. This was used to highlight patterns and establish trends relating to missing children. The service was working with the police and other agencies to resolve and have a clearer picture of any given missing episode.

The Panel learned that social workers were asked every week about the young people for whom they are responsible, discussing in detail any young person of concern.

In response to Members' questions on the how quickly a Return Home Interview should take place, officers said that it happen within seventy-two hours from the date of return. This measure was tracked demonstrating performance had improved; interviews were being completed quicker with more being completed within the required timescale. Interviews were completed by a dedicated missing team and a Return Home Interview coordinator (an in-house social worker or through a contracted service). The Return Home Interview was also a written record in the children recording system on the young person's file.

Action: For the Panel to receive:

- 1. Information on how the service was reporting and recording absence vs missing.**
- 2. Information on the EDT review to be provided within eight weeks.**

The Panel adjourned for a short break at 6:45pm

The Panel reconvened the meeting at 6:52pm

42/17 **Care Leavers' Local Offer Summary**

The Head of Service for Corporate Parenting introduced the item. The Panel had previously reviewed the care leavers' local offer summary and had determined it was too long. Officers presented a summary of the local offer which had been produced and was available on the Care Leavers smart-phone App, launched in October 2018.

Officers shared that the care leavers' local offer was sent to existing care leavers and there was also a simplified version available. Officers had also provided a clearer, simple version, for young people with learning disabilities. The Care Leaver App, Croydon Care Leaver Connect, included a summary of the local offer.

The Chair thanked the officers involved in the Care Leavers' local offer. It was highlighted that during a recent Children and Adult Care conference in Manchester, the Croydon Care Leavers' local offer was presented to all local authorities as an example of good practice.

Panel Members commended the good work. It was highlighted that work was going in the right direction with more work still to do. Officers were also praised for condensing the leaflet to a page. Some Panel Members suggested the leaflet was not sufficiently readable for an average aged child and requested this be revised.

Officers informed the Panel that the service had presented the App to the CICC with members happy with the information provided and how this was presented.

The Chair commented that ultimately the service was about delivering the best offer possible for young people and that this document would evolve and change. Members of the Panel were in consensus in supporting the aspiration to improve the performance of corporate parenting.

Action: Officers to revise the Care Leavers' local offer and bring the document to the Panel meeting in March 2019.

43/17

Annual Report of Adoption Service and Panel (Inc. plans and updates of regional adoption agency)

Officers shared with the Panel that Croydon will be part of the South London Regional Adoption Agency. The report shared details of the adoption service and the number of statutory services.

The Panel learned that Croydon Children' Services had placed fewer children for adoption this year compared to last year. Officers informed the Panel that the service had an improvement plan in place to encourage a higher level of adoptions.

Officers shared that the service had also recognised the number of children identified for adoption who as yet had not achieved an end destination.

Members of the Panel discussed children who were the subject of a placement order and questioned whether there had been a change in the average age of children on a placement order. Officers clarified that most children placed for adoption were under the age of five, (there had been a small number of children placed for adoption who were over the age of five). There had been no statutory change in the adoption process and the service had seen younger children adopted.

Further questions from Members of the Panel included whether there was any change in the likelihood of adoption of difficult to place children and whether the service had more adopters for children who have been born to specific backgrounds and needs. Officers shared that there was still a higher proportion of white children placed for adoption. The adoption team was looking at the needs of each individual child and how these can be met through adoption.

Officers highlighted that any disruption in a placement was examined through a statutory procedure. This included looking at whether the service could have foreseen and prevented the disruption within a placement.

Officers noted the benefits of being part of the Regional Adoption Agency. For example, children with cultural and special needs were more likely to be

supported through a larger service with more diverse carer recruitment. It was hoped that being able to better support the needs of individual children through a larger service would improve placement stability. Croydon's Children's Services would remain the corporate parent.

The rate of adoption for newborns being taken into care was increasing. It was hoped this would drive an upturn in Croydon's rate of adoption which remains low in comparison to the size of the borough.

Action: For the Panel to receive figures of children adopted in Croydon.

44/17 **How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?**

The Panel highlighted the following accomplishments which helped Children in Care (each Panel member was asked in turn to comment):

- The performance scorecard - it was very positive to have the involvement of the two young people in discussion of this item.
- The issues raised about indicators during the discussion had been recorded in the minutes and would be reviewed by the Panel at future meetings.
- The Panel will continue to receive information on the local offer summary and be able to comment on and improve the accessibility of this for young people.
- The Panel valued hearing directly from young people in care and their suggestions of improvements that can be made. For example, ensuring young people know how to make a complaint.
- The contribution of the young people present at the meeting showed it was right to have representatives of the CICC involved. Keen to focus on Personal Education Plans and how all the parties involved in their production can work as an effective team.
- There is the opportunity here to really achieve change. The local offer summary has to be accessible to all children, recognising the range of needs.
- Good to have young people and foster carers here. Good to hear what happens in foster homes and what the children feel.
- Foster carers' presence. Our commitment to making sure that we have clear actions that we review them so we know where we are in the improvement journey and how we are supporting young people. The commitment in the room means that when we are challenging it is understood that this is intended to help make things better.
- This year this panel had made a change in foster care. Officers are able to understand why we are asking questions. We are supported to ask questions.
- Hearing positive things from foster carers. There are a number of things that still need work. Positivity from foster carers is good, as foster carers are a tough audience. This is to be celebrated as it makes a difference to children as they spend all day with children and they are always child centred. We have had good attendance from the Children

in Care Council; they are feeding backing what children are telling them to tell us. This is a step in the right direction. For example, talking about the complaints procedure. This has made a difference.

- Great to see young people working on the pledge and we have a core offer for LAC. Needed to do the same for the pledge – having young people leading on this is good. Having foster carers present was also good. But we also have LAC who do not know how to make a complaint and an IRO who does not know how to talk to young people.
- We know our strengths and weakness as a result of the scorecard. Impressed with the clarity of the complaints procedure. Valued hearing from foster carers.
- We had discussed the reduction of the text for the core offer but this had not happened and we have not got that right balance yet. Some papers were missing which was not addressed sufficiently.

45/17 **Work Programme**

The Work Programme was considered. The Chair highlighted that the agenda items should be adhered to as detailed in the work programme. The Panel should make a commitment that items would not be moved.

46/17 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

Not Required.

The meeting ended at 7:40pm

Signed:

Date:

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