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Corporate Parenting Panel

Meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel held on Wednesday 6 March 2019 at 5.09pm in F11,
Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon, CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Alisa Flemming (Chair);
Councillors Janet Campbell, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Maria Gatland, Maddie Henson,
Shafi Khan and Helen Redfern

Co-optees

Foster Carers: Angela Christmas, Manny Kwamin, Martin Williams

Virtual School Head: Shelley Davies, Sarah Bailey

Health Commissioner: Connie Ikhifa

Also

Present:

Councillor Robert Ward

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

Vanessa Strang (Head of Corporate Parenting)

Porsha Robinson (Youth Engagement Leader)

Thomas Joyce (Youth Engagement Worker)

Child F (Young Person and Member of EMPIRE)

Child S (Young Person and Member of EMPIRE)

Child L (Young Person and Member of EMPIRE)

Child C (Young Person and Member of EMPIRE)

Child M (Young Person and Member of EMPIRE)

Child G (Young Person and Member of EMPIRE)

Child V (Young Person and Member of EMPIRE)

Child D (Young Person and Member of EMPIRE)

Kevin Wong (Coram)

Henrietta Delalu (Service Manager for Children in Care)

Spencer Duvwiana (Service Manager for Fostering)

PART A

14/19 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 16 January 2019 were agreed as an accurate record.

15/19 Disclosures of interest

There were no disclosures of pecuniary interests.

16/19 Urgent Business (if any)

There were no items of urgent business.

17/19 Update on actions agreed at previous meeting(s)

The Panel agreed to circulate actions outside the meeting.

18/19 Children in Care Performance Scorecard

The Panel was referred to the Children's Performance Dashboard provided in the agenda pack with updated data included (up to and including January 2019).

Officers described the implementation of a new process for bringing children into care. This involved a new panel where requests to bring children in to care were discussed in detail before any decision to progress was implemented. Emergency referrals into care would also have to go through this route.

However, officers also described how they were working and exploring new ways to support children to stay in their family settings avoiding the need to come into care; oversight was provided in order to give support to families where children are likely to come into care.

The new approach to bringing children into care was also focused on providing early access to permanency planning allowing for a more timely approach.

The Panel discussed the data provided through the scorecard. There was a specific focus on LAC 13 – the percentage of LAC with a Personal Education Plans (PEP) reviewed in the last six months. Panel Members questioned this figure (34%). Officers addressed this by describing the work that had been undertaken and what further was planned to happen. A dedicated officer was responsible for supporting the review of PEPs and highlighting their importance to social workers. The target had been set to review 90% of PEPs within six months. It was noted that the 15% improvement from the lowest point in performance (in late 2018) was achieved over a duration of three weeks following the recruitment of the new officer.

Officers described how support was being provided to social workers to develop their skills and strengthen their understanding of threshold criteria. They were being encouraged to talk about children's needs. It was reported how this process was creating a culture of understanding.

It was additionally emphasised that the use of thresholds only tells part of the story in terms of how practitioners approach children at risk. It was highlighted that this was about culture and having a vision for practice where Croydon will

be working more justly and humanely with families. It was described how support was being given to practitioners to understand that threshold should be consistent across the service. It was stressed that there was much greater understanding than previously in how it was possible to work with families.

19/19 Fostering

Fostering Statement of Purpose (SOP):

Officers shared that Children's Social Care (CSC) was responsible for recruiting foster carers and highlighted that the Fostering Statement of Purpose Report for 2019-20 detailed:

- i. the strategic principles of children in care;
- ii. forward plans;
- iii. what the authority had committed to provide to foster carers and the children; and
- iv. how fostering affected the lives of looked after children

The published report was structured in line with OFSTED requirements.

Recommendations:

The Panel RESOLVED that it would review;

- i. the Foster Carers Charter; and**
- ii. the Fostering Statement of Purpose.**

Feedback was received from the EMPIRE representatives present on their experiences of being in care. It was reported that this wasn't always as it was hoped for. However, there were positive experiences in terms of accessing activities organised through the foster carer agency.

The Panel led a discussion about the relationship between the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) and the looked after child. It was established that there was a new proposed structure being put in place in order to improve these relationships. This was focused on helping to understand and have insight into what was happening inside a placement. Panel Members were in consensus that the child's voice was fundamental to the improvement of the service and had to be a key part of the review of the work undertaken on an annual basis.

The Panel highlighted that it wished to gain reassurance that LAC Reviews included the feedback of a range of stakeholders including young people. It was noted that it was an important part of the IRO's role to provide the looked after child with the details of an appropriate adult they could go to in order to have someone with whom they could express their feelings. The Panel stressed how it continued to want IROs to improve the support offered to young people.

Recommendations:

- i. **for young people and their foster carers to have the direct contact information for all relevant professionals involved in their care; and**
- ii. **to bring up-to-date data on LAC children and the number of advocates to the next panel.**

It was noted that a pack already exists containing all relevant contact details for children in care that was provided when children in care were old enough. It was agreed that this should be shared with EMPIRE representatives in order to receive their feedback. Officers expressed the desire that this was appropriate and accessible for young people.

The Panel discussed the processes/support available for those in care who were new into the country. All have to be referred to the Refugee Council. This provided specialist advisers and clubs. Help was provided to enable engagement with others in similar circumstances and for specific issues. It was noted that it was important for all those involved in the care of these young people to know this support existed. For example, the Designated Teacher.

The Panel discussed the Connected Persons Report, the importance of this to the foster carer review and the need to hear the voice of young people in this review.

An EMPIRE representative shared the difficulties they were experiencing at school and how they felt alone which when expressed was not taken seriously. The Head of the Virtual School expressed sadness at this situation and that there should be professional support available but acknowledged variation in the quality of settings.

The Panel agreed that this again stressed the need for feedback from young people in order to achieve meaningful self-assessment of the service.

The Chair of the Panel explained how it was the intention to develop a number of Young Inspectors who would look at all aspect of the care provided for children and young people in Croydon. It was described how a Young Inspector would be developed from EMPIRE. This Young Inspector would then form part of the Panel's membership, providing regular feedback as well an annual review with a focus on what was missing and needed to be improved. This would support the Panel in generating a number of recommendations for implementation and demonstrate to children and young people that their views were being listened to and generating a response.

Recommendation:

As there is often long period between meetings, for the Panel to maintain its relationship with young people in care by arranging to a visit EMPIRE. A request to visit would be made.

Fostering Action Plan:

Foster carers Panel members requested that the quality of the communication with carers be examined as part of the Fostering Action Plan.

Officers requested further feedback on the Fostering Action Plan and what additional areas needed to be added.

Recommendation:

Review of the Fostering Action Plan along and the Improvement Plan be added to the Panel's work programme for review on a quarterly basis.

Recruitment and Deregistration of foster carers:

Deregistration

Officers explained how Croydon had a large population of foster carers with only a small percentage who leave. This was set against a national trend of movement in the foster carer population which was a product of volatility at a national level as opposed to being caused by local reasons. (This included fosters carers taking Special Guardianship Orders.) It was highlighted that the authority had plans in place to fill any gaps in foster carer provision.

Deregistration's were reviewed with work happening to prevent those where this was the desired outcome and requests were made for deregistration to be revoked.

Recruitment

Officers updated the Panel on the recruitment of foster carers. Over 100 enquires have been received against a target to add a further 60 over a period of two years. The service was working with the Foster Carer Association to explore how foster carers themselves can support recruitment through activities such as word of mouth and helping to review marketing. The campaign started in January 2019 and is led by Coram which was based in the authority's offices. This was a commissioned service but there was a responsibility that targets were met and work completed. It was explained that the target was exclusive of recruitment of the connected person (for which recruitment is via a different route) and that the current target was perceived as a minimum with a desire that this be exceeded.

Officers stressed the difference between recruiting foster carers and achieving approved carer status. Whilst Coram was responsible for recruitment everything beyond this was the responsibility of the Fostering Service.

It was explained that the recruitment wasn't focused on foster carers for specific forms of placements. The need for those able to address behaviour

issues would be dealt with through training and ongoing support. The aspiration was for carers who could support the full range of needs.

The foster carer Panel members asked that foster carer allowances be reviewed in order to address Croydon's lack of competitiveness.

7:07pm Cllr Maria Gatland left the meeting

Officers responded that allowances were currently being reviewed; the authority recognised the importance of addressing this as well as providing good support. The service in Croydon being described as good would be a big attraction. However, money should not be the motivation. Panel Members thought there was merit in reviewing the package but thought there was also a need to see what Coram achieved first.

7:17pm Cllr Henson left the meeting.

Recommendation:

The foster care allowance to be brought to the Panel for review in summer 2019.

Adoption Statement of Purpose:

Officers updated the Panel that Croydon was no longer part of the *Adopt South*. This would be reflected in the Adoption Statement of Purpose (SOP). Officers highlighted that there were no further major changes with the Adoption SOP. This set out what Croydon was doing for looked after children;

RESOLVED: the Panel noted all the reports.

20/19 How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?

The Panel highlighted the following accomplishments which helped Children in Care:

- The Panel listened to the voice of children, responded to points raised and reflected on this to inform practice. The Panel had focused on how the voice of children could be heard in a systematic way;
- Positive that the Foster Care Charter was being developed to set a minimum expectation of a response from the social worker to the foster carer in a set period of time;
- Impressed that young people were part of the Panel and they felt confident to express their views and concerns. It was good for them to see that they were being listened to and their views being taken on-board;
- Positive to have the meetings to see what was to be actioned. The suggestion of an spreadsheet of actions was discussed;
- Impressed with the contribution of young people to the Panel. Stressed the need to inform them of the action being taken;

- Wanted to hear progress from young people on the issue of knowing who to complain; and
- Positive that young people were included in the Panel. Need to focus on those foster children who are isolated. Highlighted that it was young people themselves who knew what a good foster home looked like. Welcomed the opening up the IRO role; it was good to challenge the role of the IRO which should also be evaluated by young people. Stressed the need for information for young people to be made available in a range of suitable languages;
- Valued the views of young people being expressed at the Panel. Looked forward to attending EMPIRE;
- Would be getting the input of young people to the foster carer review;
- Sad to hear some of the stories from young people. This should not be their experience. The deep dive foster carer review needed to ensure it was capturing the voice of children. Members of the Panel asking to be invited to EMPIRE was a real positive and would have a beneficial impact for looked after children; and
- It was powerful to welcome young people to the Panel. It was a powerful message for them to attend the meeting. The Panel could underestimate the strength and confidence of young people in care. Found having young people at the Panel inspirational. Needed to consider opportunities to do more and how Croydon was able to support children long-term. For example, through apprenticeships etc

21/19 Work Programme

It was agreed this would be reviewed in anticipation of the new municipal year.

22/19 Exclusion of the Press and Public

This item was not required.

The meeting ended at 8.00 pm

Signed:

Date:

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