

## Corporate Parenting Panel

Meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel held on Wednesday, 13 November 2019 at 5.04 pm  
in F10, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

### MINUTES

**Present:** Councillor Alisa Flemming (Chair);

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

**Co-optee Members:**

Foster Carer Representatives: Angela Christmas and Manny Kwamin;  
Care Leaver Representative; Ashleigh Searle;  
EMPIRE: Young People and Council Staff;  
Virtual School: Sarah Bailey  
Health Commissioner: Fiona Simmons

**Also**

**Present:** Jo Negrini (Chief Executive Officer)  
Nick Pendry (Director of Early Help and Children's social Care)  
Vanessa Strang (Head of Social Work with Children Looked After and Care Leavers)  
Laura Saunders (Senior Commissioning Manager)  
Emily Collinsbeare (Youth Engagement Manager)  
Rodica Cobarzan (Service Manager Fostering)  
Clive Seall (Interim Head of Early Help)  
Jade Lloyd (Youth Engagement Worker)

**Apologies:** Apologies for lateness received from Councillors Alisa Flemming; apologies for absence received from Cllr Janet Campbell and Co-optee Member Martin Williams (Chair of Foster Carers Association).

### PART A

Cllr Fitzpatrick nominated Cllr Khan to start the meeting.  
Cllr Gatland Seconded the motion.

*Councillor Shafi Khan Chaired the meeting from its start until the arrival of Councillor Flemming.*

**45/19 Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 5 September 2019 were agreed as an accurate record.

**46/19 Disclosures of interest**

There were no disclosures of interests.

**47/19 Urgent Business (if any)**

There was no urgent business.

**48/19 Update on actions agreed at previous meeting(s)**

At the last Corporate Parenting Panel, Members requested an action log for issues raised be kept as record.

There were a number of actions raised from the previous meeting and officers updated the Panel with the status of the actions. These included:

1 – *Following up on the complaints made by a young person in foster care placement.* This issue had been addressed by the team and with the young person. The service manager had an oversight of the YP and their care plan, and further follow-ups had been put in place.

2 – *A consultation document for the young people.* A Pathway Plan template had been put to the young people for consultation. As a result, a focus group consultation had taken place.

3 – *A breakdown report of staff turnover in fostering service.* This had been submitted and had shown that the turnover had been low. The information would be forwarded to everyone.

4 – *An urban dictionary for social work officers.* This was to be coproduced by EMPIRE. This has been followed through.

5 – *Advocacy sessions with young people.* Youth Services were exploring “I am Amazing” to deliver sessions to EMPIRE. This would be something the team would roll out internally with their own resources.

6 – *A presentation of Virtual School to EMPIRE.* Virtual School had made arrangements to meet with EMPIRE later in November 2019 to discuss the feedback received in February. Virtual School representatives would be attend EMPIRE sessions once every half term so education was embedded in the themes happening at their session.

7 – *Work around the Independent Visiting Service.* The Independent Visiting Service was contacted for arrangements to talk with EMPIRE and share what the service offer.

8 – *Advertising EMPIRE to all Children Looked After* – Following a PEP meeting, a flyer and leaflet was the chosen method to give out to foster carers

and young people when meetings are taking place. This had been put in place.

*17:19 – Cllr Flemming attended the meeting.*

*Councillor Flemming directed the remainder of the meeting as Chair. The order of the meeting was revised to include EMPIRE.*

#### **49/19 Children in Care Performance Scorecard**

The Head of Social Work with Children Looked After and Care Leavers gave an update of the September month performance, which highlighted the service performance was doing well in some areas and had struggled in other areas.

Officers shared that the local authority had 548 children in care of which 290 children were looked after from unaccompanied minors from aged 16 who came from Lunar House and were cared for by another local authority.

There were more performances noted in amber than red which was good progress for the service improvement journey.

One of the red performance issues, related to having an updated care plan and pathway plan for looked after children. It was noted that a new system had been introduced for social workers to use. In addition, a new pathway plan had been more child friendly and focused to ease the problems raised. The updated pathway plan was due to be launched this November 2019.

Officers highlighted a change in targets and expectations in foster care visits, and had introduced for social workers to conduct an every 4-week visit to foster carers, with expectations to rise to 95% from 85% last year.

The Panel discussed what had been heard and questions were asked. EMPIRE noted that the percentage was low for the 17-15 aged group of children and they asked how Children Services helped children in education, not in employment and training. Officers said that collaborations with the children's services and Virtual School were in process of setting up a NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) Panel, to set up a multi-disciplinary panel to see what we can do in the wider council and with develops relationships to address other issues to look at real opportunity for young people. The idea had come from the model used in the Camden borough, which was looked at as part of the improvement model for Croydon. It was noted that figures needed to improve and this was the first step to address the issues.

The Chief Executive Officer noted that some of the failures before reemployment and training were left in one department. In light of these issues, it was noted that the Council would be doing more to encourage young people in work or training by way of apprentices and other

opportunities. There was an agency called Croydon Works, which had brought other opportunities and networking. Croydon Hospital and the Council looked to create better opportunities for the young person.

Other Members commented on the notable progress made within the service from the scorecard presented, though concerns were raised around continued employment for young people aged 20 who had employment for twelve months.

Officers shared that training was offered to staff for additional support in their workforce and further took on board comments highlighted by the Panel to enhance the service.

The Panel discussed the issue of the consistency in visits and how it was monitored. Co-optee Members highlighted the pressures social workers had in trying to fit in 6-weekly visits and reducing caseloads. Officers acknowledged that social workers had been under pressure to complete home visits in 6 weeks and to reduce the target would be difficult as the 6-weekly target was not successful, and suggested that the visits should be monitored before moving on to another target. Other issues in visits were raised concerning clear promises that were not often followed through and visits that were not often planned. Officers responded that the service was introducing a better way for social workers to plan visits, by encouraging standard practices to book three to six months in advance with a letter template so the young person and the foster carer know of their scheduled appointment.

Officers noted the report stated a 4-weekly fostering visit, which was incorrect and should be noted for a 6-weekly fostering visit. The service had introduced good practise of a 4-weekly visit and working towards 6-weekly. Further, officers noted that management was working to support staff in their demanding work to help build an improved performance within the service.

The Panel discussed the pathway plans and its statutory entitlements, and Members relayed the ongoing issues of its availability within the timescales provided to the young person. Members were glad to see the changes included a better template in completing the plans, and were concerned of its unclear timekeeping. Members were further concerned with the quality of visits and giving staff support. Officers acknowledged that timekeeping with pathway plans was an issue and indicated that their aspiration to change the way pathway plans were coordinated would reduce the issues highlighted, and every young person and foster carer would have a copy of the care plan within the required time. Further, officers were insuring that all social workers had manageable caseloads to deliver quality service.

**ACTION: Clarity around timescales for pathway plans to return back to Panel.**

The Panel discussed the raised concerns of young people who were known to be drifting off, and officers assured that there were support for young people to access, such as Legacy. The leaflets had been distributed to professionals and schools which provided information on Legacy so young people are aware of it. The Chair acknowledged there were issues arising in young people on a case by case basis, and more emphasis was given that they are supported across the board. Officers noted that the service were looking at different support based on the individual needs, to reduce people feeling panicked and overwhelmed.

*At 5:58pm the Panel adjourned for a short break*

*At 6:04pm the Panel resumed the meeting*

## **50/19 Annual Report of Virtual School - Data Update**

The Head of Virtual School introduced the updated report, which was a request of the Panel to return from the last meeting in September 2019.

Inside the report there was additional information to answer questions around looked after children and supporting them to get to university.

The report also highlighted the raw data of children in Key Stage 5, aged 17 and 18, who had taken A-levels (or equivalent) and would take other courses before they went to university. The Panel heard that personal advisors had been available to help advocate for young people and some universities were also helpful in providing support.

The report also showed that seventeen reception children required a huge amount of support in reading and writing, though the percentage was low, the service would want to do more.

Officers shared that there was a special phase for education to work with young people to close gaps in numbers, alongside working with foster carers. There were some people within that group not captured due to adoption. The Chief Executive Officer commented on the types of interventions addressed to bridge the gap. Officers said that the schools were working closely with foster carers and there was also training for carers for “play” at home and what could be offered through growth and play. The whole package included language skills and vocabulary.

The Chair commented on the pathway plans highlighting that a good development level for children starting primary school would prepare them for secondary school. Noting that there were challenges for the young person in taking their GCSEs at a later stage, it was important to understand how the service supported children so the gap did not increase year on year. Whilst a structured plan was really important, the model was utilised for the right cases. Officers encouraged for children to be taught reading at home the same way they are taught in school to help uniform the structure.

EMPIRE made reference to the support professionals would provide children going through stress, anxiety or depression in the long term future. Officers informed the Panel that the service worked with all the professionals working with children, providing training to understand awareness and better relate to children who suffered and would require support. Co-optee Members noted the encouraging change Virtual School had put in place, and commented on the provisions to unaccompanied asylum seeking children that there were professional services such as Off The Record for counselling, which was deemed positive.

**ACTION – CEO to work with Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care to look at how the service and the Council (as an organisation) could create opportunities to children.**

**ACTION – CEO to work with the Director of Human Resources to raise the role of volunteering within the Council to support the Looked After Children Service (assisting young children in reading etc).**

The Panel discussed the issue around the threshold for CAMHS, and noted that there was a push back to the role of CAMHS and other services who were supporting the young person. Officers informed that CAMHS were doing a lot of work on the transformation plan for more opportunity and integrated services. The service were looking at things nationally to get away from the emotional work, and looked at clinical work in the community and in schools for good guidance and expectations. Members of the Panel acknowledged the difficulty involved within the LAC services and highlighted the importance of hearing the voice of the young person. Other Co-optee Members noted that another local authority in Bexley recognised perspective from a young person by introducing the social worker to think about a young person's experience.

Officers further informed the Panel that they were looking for a Tier 2 or 3 SLAM service for a young person who came into care and the experienced they have and look at a fast response and different support offered, from independent fostering agencies directed for children and their caregivers.

**ACTION – For the Service to start thinking of ways we communicate with individuals on their social, emotional and physical wellbeing, rather than Tier 4 provision in SLAM.**

Further discussions on CAMHS from Panel Members wanted to see a CAMHS service operate within schools, which would be better effective. This would manage time, resources and the demotivation of a young person being taken by a parent or foster carer.

Virtual School highlighted a project that was funded year by year providing trainee staff to provide mental health services. This needed ongoing medium funding. This would be additional support provided by schools which is not directly linked to CAMHS.

Other comments discussed by the Panel acknowledged that whilst CAMHS may be stretched, the alternative methods for mental health support is not often appreciated, this is because other methods are not often talked about. Work with Off The Record, and Mindness and other methods were to be recognised as an alternative method for young people to use in a positive way. This was to be further explored. Further comments from EMPIRE highlighted that children were not often comfortable in one to one therapy sessions and may feel tranquil in group sessions. The idea for the group therapy to happen outside of school time or at weekends; to provide a session in school or youth clubs as it would be beneficial for children to get involved, was put forward. It was noted by officers who addressed the Panel that there was specification to provide the services young people were asking for.

**ACTION – To consider and introduce group therapy to young children as an alternative to one-to-one therapy. EMPIRE to lead.**

In response to questions raised by Panel Members regarding the creation of an app to support young people when applying for university, officers highlighted that the service had newly signed a years' license for a software that was being trialled.

**ACTION – To have data of all support available for LAC when they go to university, i.e. What are the choices, what is supported, how to apply, all the stages from UCAS to personal specification, with case studies. To be in collaboration with the Leaving Care Team [long-term action].**

**ACTION – To integrate the local offer for care leavers.**

Further questions from EMPIRE were asked regarding how young people could access their pupil premium and how they could access computers available at home. Officers shared that pupil premium money was given to schools to choose how it could be spent. Going forward, some of the pupil premium would be held back for money to be spent on a laptop or a tech model for each child aged 9+. EMPIRE further enquired regarding the support available to buy books for studying core subjects and other subjects in preparation for GCSE, and officers confirmed that all materials would come from the same pot of money accessed through school, and support was available via Virtual School. It was also noted that foster carers received allowances for books.

The Chair concluded for officers to provide an overview of schools across the borough to show how Pupil Premium was being used as not many parents had been informed about the scheme or know how to use it, and further to support carers in how to use Pupil Premium.

**ACTION – Virtual School to provide an overview of the spending in pupil premium.**

## 51/19 Children Looked After Health Commissioning and Performance

Officers introduced the report informing on the performance of the initial health assessments for all young people in care who were seen by a care professional or a LAC (Looked After Child) Medical.

Questions from EMPIRE included how the NHS kept a track on the mental health of the young children, how long the information was stored for and the confidentiality of data. Officers informed the Panel that there was ongoing work around monitoring health needs and reviewing individual data. A spreadsheet was used to capture data for officers to have a better picture of what was being recorded. Officers confirmed that the information stored was for up to ten years due to the request of information that may be required within the decade to provide answers to the individual or involved services. With regards to confidentiality, officers advised that consent was often granted before staff completed a medical, the staff would explain the routine process and who would be in the know of their medical information to the young person before they are to sign any form. It was said that usually the social worker, the school nurse and the GP were kept aware of the health of their young person, though if the young person did not want their medical notes to be shared this was to be acknowledged.

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) was interested to understand what the reasons were for young people declining health medicals and issues around health assessments, why there was a dip in completing health assessments and what the service was doing. Officers informed that they were working very closely with Children's Services for better communication between the systems for referrals to be received on time. Officers informed the Panel that there was difficulty in completing health assessments if the referral was not received within the timescales.

A delay to the receipt of a referral would often include incorrect information of the young person's foster carer to book appointments. Officers added that there was a high rate of children who do not attend scheduled appointments, which meant having to reschedule.

Officers highlighted that the health team was aware of the difficulty in timescales and were reviewing standards to improve the service. The health service was further reviewing their assessments and were at a point where they were sharing information twelve weeks in advance. The service had put a lot of intensity into one area as other areas were often missed, and needed to understand why it was not happening from a themed perspective.

The CEO, on reviewing an action plan, asked as part of the action plan whether there were key actions to dealing with the backlog and work for the ones backlogged, and further asked whether there were capacity issues. Officers addressed the queries by stating that they were putting in plans and through their data were looking at how far behind they were, and the approach to work on clearing the backlog without creating another backlog. The service were also providing appropriate provision for better assessments. Conversations between services had improved and GPs were given more

time to complete their assessments. Officers confirmed that there were no capacity issues within the service, and with the review health assessments, the service had capacity within the nursing team, which was positive.

Co-optee Members complimented four LAC assessment reviews and initial assessments they attended, which were spot on and within the three weeks' timescale. The only concern shared was that contact information is often not updated and foster carers receive calls for children not in their care. Officers commented that the doctors who see the young person do not often spend a lot of time with the young person and would generally need more than one hour to complete their assessment. Two hours was generally given to an unaccompanied child, which was deemed appropriate. Doctors were also able to access a lot of information, however cross borough records were more difficult to access. Part of the improvement plan was for communication to be better between boroughs for sharing data.

The Panel heard that the service had a requirement for GPs to spend more time with the young person and training had been put in place for unaccompanied asylum seeking children's information to make referrals as appropriate. There was also a triage in process for the most appropriate GP or paediatrician to pick up on the referrals and put in place adequate time.

The Panel discussed their disappointment in reasons why assessments were delayed or not completed within the timescales, and there were still some uncertainty as to what the delays were. Members also noted that twenty-three missed children according to the report was very upsetting, and noted a communication problem between the foster carers and health should be looked into further. In detail, officers said that the twenty-three missed children related to the young children who were not brought in to have their assessment completed. Officers further commented that the young people who were being cared for should be encouraged to attend appointments. For the purpose of the report the wording was changed to "did not attend".

The Panel would like to see the service review the way health services complete assessments to avoid missing vital information in young people. The Chair added that it was important that this was monitored across the board as it was very important for a child or an unaccompanied asylum seeking child coming into the system to see the process in a seamless way without any blockage. Though this was a very good report there was a request for wider detail.

**ACTION: Health Paper to return to the next CPP meeting to review shortfalls, and why it is happening. Regarding the 23 missed children and overview of the process in wider detail.**

#### **52/19 How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?**

The Panel highlighted the accomplishments and discussed changes to help Children in Care.

A big thank you was awarded to EMPIRE for their suggestion made at the meeting which was powerful and clear.

**53/19 Work Programme**

The work programme was received for information.

**54/19 Exclusion of the Press and Public**

Not required.

The meeting ended at 7.15 pm

**Signed:**

**Date:**

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