

Corporate Parenting Panel

Meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel held on Wednesday, 4 March 2020 at 5.13pm
in F10, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Alisa Flemming (Chair);

Councillors Shafi Khan, Janet Campbell, Bernadette Khan, Maria Gatland and Helen Redfern

Co-optee Members

Virtual School: Shelley Davies, Anton Stewart;

Health Commissioners: Amanda Tuke

EMPIRE: Young People and Council Staff

Care Leaver Representative; Ashleigh Searle

Foster Carer Representatives: Angela Christmas and Manny Kwamin

Also

Present: Vanessa Strang (Head of Social Work with Children Looked After and Care Leavers)

Clive Seall (Head of Early Help and Youth Service)

Priya Wilson (Early Help and Youth Service)

Porsha Robinson (Youth Service)

Rodica Cobarzan (Fostering Service)

Diane Smith (Executive Support Officer)

Apologies: Councillor Jerry Fitzpatrick

The Panel heard that Martin Williams had resigned and stepped down from the Corporate Parenting Panel as chair of Fostering. The Panel thanked Mr Williams in his absence for his contribution to the Panel over the years and sent well wishes.

PART A

11/20 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 15 January 2020 were agreed as an accurate record.

12/20 Disclosures of interest

There were none.

13/20 Urgent Business (if any)

There was none.

14/20 Update on actions agreed at previous meeting(s)

The Head of Social Work, Children Looked After and Care Leavers talked through the actions which had been completed.

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

In regards to the actions in November 2019:

1 - The Chief Executive Officer had attended a meeting in November 2019 in response to virtual school and how the service supported children in education to close the gap. The service encouraged reading and how staff could support reading activities with looked after children and how this would be maintained.

There were discussions regarding the improvement of the apprenticeship and volunteering programme and the Chief Executive Officer had requested that the Human Resources team took lead and also directors within the council to offer apprentice opportunities. Officers was to receive a detailed feedback on this progress in June.

In relation to exploring reading initiative in virtual school, the service was supporting the programme to encourage social workers and foster carers to be involved in further reading to children of all ages which would promote more reading. The Panel discussed the action and EMPIRE commented that young people should be given the option as support for long term outcomes may work for some young people having the extra person whilst others it may not be considered. The foster carer's representative noted that foster carers required training in this area for improved parenting skills, to include reading materials. It was important that this training threaded from recruitment which would be a better practise for development and change.

It was further raised by EMPIRE that some young people obtained difficult relationships with their foster carers and see their carers for support around the home and thus another member or a tutor should be considered to provide help with something educational to give encouragement, this should vary on age i.e. being home for the younger children and at the centre for the older children for more independence.

At 5:29pm Councillor Bernadette Khan attended the Panel meeting.

Officers discussed the letter box which was packed with games and worked well for carers. This was aimed at young people aged 13, with the intention to build better relationships. The letter box was to follow the young person should they move between placements to provide consistency. Officers added that the advisory teachers would conduct phonics and reading support with children at The Arc School. There were also learning mentors currently in place to help support young people; the learning mentors are trained volunteers who could also promote the importance of reading. The notion for

the support was to provide opportunity for young people to access additional support, as young people were not engaged with the process.

2 – Officers talked of the therapeutic support required for young people and the notion of group therapy. Current services included CAMHS offered support for emotional and mental health issues. There were also support services provided for looked after children. The Panel commented that it was important for supported staff to have life experience, for the young person to relate.

There was a suggestion for young people who were in care or had left care to sit on the Panel. EMPIRE suggested for past care leavers to plan a session for young people in care to help with their ongoing experience; in addition, for care leavers should be included in receiving therapeutic support. Panel Members supported the view that psychologists should be available to support children and foster carers. Officers shared the view of the budget, in that services would reallocate the money to fund the new requested therapeutic service. The budget would ensure children had greater access for support when required. Though it was noted that there would always be issues with demand, a much needed flexible service was desired. This service would also connect with school counselling services.

15/20 The National Pledge, Croydon Commitment to Children in Care and the Local Offer for Care Leavers

The Head of Early Help and Youth Service spoke to the report and addressed Members that the service was planning to refresh the care leavers pledge by presenting to the Panel the first draft.

Officers informed that financially the leaving care policy was to be finalised by the end of the month to reform the local offer and take to Cabinet with a proposed budget requirement.

Officers aimed to adopt the national pledge providing a new commitment to looked after children and to refresh the local offer. There were ten points in the Pledge, twelve commitments to looked after children and also a refreshed local offer.

The care leaver representative made a comment highlighting from the information provided in the report that there were no detail on resource or limitation, and was also concerned that social housing would be entitled to fifteen leaving care children tenants a year which was a low number. Officers noted that there was more detail in what the service had to offer.

EMPIRE made a comment addressing that young people who went into care should be provided with the pledge so they understood their entitlements, for this would refrain any problems within the care home.

A member from EMPIRE highlighted her experience of a promise being breached as she was affected so much, she had to retake exams due to housing situations. She addressed that young people took promises very seriously especially coming from a traumatic background, and what the local authority decided what was suitable and affordable, was perceived different to a young person.

The Chair made note that a housing representative was not present on the Panel, and welcomed a representative in future meetings to comment on concerns raised related to housing and to provide their expertise.

Concerns were raised by the Panel around whether the pledge could be delivered as succinct as it looked on paper, and recommended for a shorter pledge to deliver what could be achieved.

Officers noted on the budget and the proposal to Cabinet as the service revisited their financial needs to process how they would better support young people.

EMPIRE raised questions relating to how the service could reassure that promises were adhered to within the pledge, and officers noted the difficulties in maintaining standards and addressed that the pledge was provided to hold the service accountable for things that had not been deemed right. EMPIRE noted that they had been involved in the twelve points within the pledge, and emphasised the point around housing that the local authority had a responsibility to a child in care to establish their living arrangements.

The Chair summarised a testimony previously heard at the Panel in the last two years of the impact other young children had relating to house viewings with little to no support. This pledge had derived from testimonies as such, and there should be standards to a suitable housing.

A member of EMPIRE shared their testimony around receiving support as a child in care and verified the testimony shared from the care leaver representative, as they highlighted that the service was not only putting children at risk, but also to foster carers as they often receive blame. They continued to address that young people wanted a little more than the basics in accommodation, which should be reviewed by the housing team themselves. Officers shared that it was difficult to deliver such request as social housing was expensive within the borough. Panel Members commented on the pledge and its capacity to help build a social life for young people in touching base with their family and friends and having basic skills to live alone, with the same principle as the pathway plan, young people needed support and services needed to find a better way to deliver this and be more ambitious for the young people.

EMPIRE members continued to ask questions around how and who young people could turn to if the pledge was not being adhered to, and officers sited the importance of wanting the pledge to aspire to young people, and in setting

the standards, the onus was on the service and the wider team to set themselves the challenge to work towards.

The Chair recommended for the pledge to not be too restrictive, ensuring it was broad enough for each young person to have their individuality but fitted enough for a better life for them. It was important that the young people believed in the services provided.

EMPIRE members further added that young children who were in care in Croydon and had left the borough, received no after care from the service, and they are often felt forgotten, and unless the young person returns to Croydon there was no support for them; and asked why was there no a similar offer to young people out of borough, and officers emphasised on the pressure personal advisers had whose role was to redirect care leavers to access support. Officers encouraged the young children to talk to their social worker and their managers, and other bodies such as Coram Voice. Officers further informed that the children's services and leaving care services remained the same in supporting children out of borough. The service looked to see what opportunities there was locally to them rather than within Croydon. It was the responsibility of the service to see that this was followed through, as services continued to want the best for the children in Croydon.

The Panel reflected on the historical care system which was bad and resulted in the service receiving a fail by Ofsted in 2017. Officers ensured that over the years the service had made a refreshed commitment that children's voices were listened, and that services across partners provided support to young people, in confidence that the children currently in care received a better experience.

Officers mentioned the deep dive relating to housing for care leavers aged 16-25. There was a lot of attraction on this to better understand the housing in place, and there was to be a plan formulated following results. Housing and Homelessness was a recommendation that had come from Ofsted inspections. Panel Members commented that safety should be paramount in placing young children in accommodation and that recourse to complain and do more should be provided to young children should the criteria not be met. Further comments expressed concern on the culture of providing less standards to care leavers as visitation of housing before allocation does not appear to be happening, and lack of communication with partners causing problem as departments protect their budgets. There should be better ambition to the children in Croydon. There was a recognition in the shortage of affordable housing specifically for care leavers. The Panel recognised the ambition from all services, and discussed the affect around housing issues effecting wellbeing, mental health and other matters.

ACTION – To have a housing representative attend Panel meetings.

16/20 Young Director

The Early Help and Youth Service Officer spoke to the director report highlighting that the role of the young director would be to support the leaving care and EMPIRE. Officers believed this would tie in with the leaving care pledge and commitment.

The service conducted surveys and the feedback was for a young director to be the voice of the child. This was supported by the leaving care service.

Personal advisors would be present to support the young person through this process.

£19802 would be reviewed as the National Living Wage. It was to take 12-15 months to complete the apprenticeship and everyone was welcomed to apply.

The Panel heard that the role of Young Director would be advertised from between 1st and 30th of April 2020. The job advert was requesting for care leavers to apply of whom were aged between 18 and 25 years. There was to be a 3-stage interview process for this post and the full-time post would be available in June 2020.

Officers informed that there were open days for candidates available who were interested in finding more information about what a young director was.

The Chair proposed for the appointed young director to be invited as a member on the Panel. Further, Members recommended for the person in post to have care experience.

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

17/20 Young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

The Head of Virtual School spoke to the follow-up report which was a request from last Panel in relation to figures in detail.

Officers highlighted from the report that the service had a high percentage of care leavers not in education or training (NEET).

The service were working with people in post 16 to work with their pathway to take the journey and be successful.

The Panel discussed the report presented and raised various points.

The care leaver representative made comment that the young people needed to be supported in applying for jobs and not just apprenticeships. Further exploration on the route for care leavers should not just relate to apprenticeships as there were many young people who had experience and a qualification and they should be encouraged to fence away from apprenticeships. Care leavers should also be given the opportunity to apply

and be treated like other applicants and not singled out, and more needed to be employed in the council. Officers noted that virtual school were reviewing the impact of possibly labelling care leavers and were working towards a better direction.

Panel Members queried on how achievable 85% was in training, as 11.5 of the 15% was seen as achievable. Officers informed that no target was set around this as virtual school wanted care leavers to be in some form of education training or employment. The target was achievable though there were some people who were not impacted, numbers was based on the aspiration.

Panel Members raised concern on the support for care leavers when young people attend university, especially around housing. Testimonies from previous care leavers had been advised to sell their belongings and give up their current home provided by housing. There was no reassurance that the young person would receive housing support upon their return from university. An EMPIRE member highlighted many friends had had stayed in London to not lose their homes, and many care leavers look for university within London and not outside London.

Further comments were raised that it was important to recognise the transition from key stage 4 to key stage 5, and from key stage 5 to further or higher education, and officers were working on how they could support children moving to post 16 and post 19 and reviewing the pathway, this was a collective responsibly.

Officers further shared that they were raising the attainment in children's pathway to university without any hurdles or to further their education. Further there was clear commitment in the local offer for how the service could support young people in going to university. This relied on a case by case and the individual circumstances.

Panel Members noted that a lot of information around education and employment was not feedback to the young person or the foster carer which was something that needed to be addressed as there was a gap in communication. This included any information on what support young people were to expect when they go to university.

EMPIRE member noted that communication was important and support and promises should be adhered to and it should not end at the point to going to university, but should be supported throughout their time in university.

EMPIRE member also noted the 85% who were in education and doing well, and wondered about those who were not in education or doing an apprentice. Officers shared of their vision for children to be in education, employment and in training and that there was opportunity for young people beyond school; that it was also important that they were successful in what they do.

At 7pm, Councillor Maria Gatland left the Panel meeting.

ACTION – Following a low number in attendance at training, to make sure reminders were sent out for training.

ACTION – To check for a clear protocol around how we support children in university.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report of Young people Not in Education, Employment or Training.

18/20 Children in Care Performance Scorecard

The report of the Care Performance Scorecard was received for information.

The Chair addressed concern on the key indicator that was in red status:

- Indicator 15: Up-to-date pathway plan; and
- Indicator 16: Up-to-date health assessments

In relation to pathway plans, officers shared with the Panel that young children did receive their pathway plans, and what the scorecard indicated was how up-to-date the plans were. Officers informed that the red status highlighted what was being measured, and to avoid future confusion officers would break down the data to provide better clarity on what was being recorded.

ACTION – For future reports to have a detailed breakdown of data.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report of the Children in Care Performance Scorecard.

19/20 Annual Report of Fostering Service and Panel

The Head of Fostering Service spoke to the Annual report of the progress of Fostering Service. Officers highlighted that the fostering service covered the recruitment and support services provided to young children.

The Panel heard that prior to 2019 the workforce of the Fostering Service had been stable. There had been two service reviews which highlighted the weakness of how practice was within the service. A lot of drive had been made for the fostering service.

Further, officers shared that there were no change to the number of foster carers employed. The service continued to have 231 foster carers, with over 800 young children placed amongst them.

The service considered a matching process and was mindful in placing a child within the right household.

In addition, officers highlighted from the report that there were a number of key priorities for service development over the year, this included:

- Relationship building with foster carers that included a systemic practice model for confidence and resilience;
- Increasing panels for children; and
- Placement stability and contacting difficult households; to name a few.

Officers further highlighted that the recruitment of foster carers service would return back into the borough. (Foster carers were currently recruited from a Panel outside of the borough). Training was also available to ensure that the borough had the right foster carers to care for Croydon children.

In response to EMPIRE's question on how young people would know what they were entitled to when in foster care, officers responded that a joint responsibility through the services would ensure that young children were informed. Additionally, the service had developed a new policy for what all young children would receive. This delivered transparency in what the service provided. Officers further ensured that children and young people should know what they should be entitled to at the placement agreement meeting providing detailed information.

Panel Co-optee Members commented on the service structure noting that there was no mention on the children's path or social work team, and officers clarified that the structure was an overview of the fostering service and what the service was delivering.

Panel Members was interested to know what the young children would say about the change and ambitions, and how young children would feel confident with the support that they would receive. Officers shared that the service was with young carers and statutory things had been put in place to hear the voice of the child. As the fostering panel had been reconstituted, the service was strengthening relationships with foster carers, conducting home visits as and when necessary.

Panel Co-optee Members commented on the key priorities, training learning development, noting that foster carers work very hard at what they do to support the service and children in their care, though they had difficulties with the pathway plans which was to provide a smooth transition. Officers noted that the paperwork needed to be completed and received by the social worker.

The Chair highlighted that the difficulty of the pathway plan and all the paperwork was an issue which needed to be rectified in order for a smooth transition.

ACTION – To address the issue of pathway plan for a smooth transition.

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

20/20 Fostering Service Statement of Purpose

The Head of Fostering Service spoke to this report and highlighted that the fostering service statement of purpose was updated every year to be shared with the Panel.

The Panel **RESOLVED** for this to be reviewed in the next meeting.

21/20 How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?

The Chair thanked EMPIRE for their presence and contribution to the Panel meeting.

Care Leaver representative shared her document titled "All about Me/Us". This was based on a young person's profile document for foster carers to receive a better picture of their young person. EMPIRE were happy with the documents, and foster carers forum were invited to attend. This document had been trialled with young children.

The Chair thanked the team around the lead on this work, which was seen simple and affective; The 'ME' referred to the young person identifying themselves, equally the 'US' was an opportunity for the carer to identify themselves for the young person.

It was considered that a copy of the Me and Us would be attached with the pledge.

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

22/20 Work Programme

The Chair proposed that the work programme should be discussed after urgent business.

23/20 Exclusion of the Press and Public

Not required.

The meeting ended at 7:30pm

Signed:

Date: