

Corporate Parenting Panel

Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on Wednesday, 28 April 2021 at 5.06 pm.
This meeting was held virtually.

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Alisa Flemming (Chair);

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

Co-optee Members

Shelley Davies (Virtual School)
Angela Christmas (Foster Carer Representative),
Manny Kwamin (Foster Carer Representative),
Dr Julia Simpson (LAC Nurse/Doctor),
Porsha Robinson (EMPIRE),
Ashleigh Searle (Care Leaver Representative)
Pasquale Brammer (Health Commissioner) and
Fiona Simmons (Health Commissioner)

Also

Present: Councillor Maddie Henson
Roisin Madden (Interim Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care)
David Garland (Lead Commissioner, Commissioning and Procurement)
Veronika Yaricheva (Young Director)
Maret Arselgova (Young Director Apprentice)
Sara Lewis (Children Safeguarding Co-ordinator, Housing)
Sarah Lawton (Interim Head of Temporary Accommodation & Service Development)
Brian Amos (Service Manager Early Help)

Apologies: Councillor Maria Gatland

PART A

1/21 Minutes of the previous meeting

There were no minutes to consider.

2/21 Disclosures of interest

There were none.

3/21 Urgent Business (if any)

There was none.

4/21 Update on actions agreed at previous meeting(s)

There were none.

5/21 Children in Care Performance Scorecard

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

- the pathway plans were still within the red band highlighting the importance to work with the young people;
- the health assessments was a working progress;
- It was good to have consistency in social workers, 85% of Children Looked After were placed less than twenty miles from home;
- There was improvement on foster carers; and
- Virtual School in Croydon does very good in keeping children in employment and training.

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

- There were thirty-five children placed in a residential accommodation within the last year.
- The 10% of reviews and care plans not up-to-date were addressed in the weekly reports reviewed and operated within the service, which the performance team provided for officers to stay on top with data. The scorecard was therefore the highest level and provided other information such as health and delay. The performance meetings held addressed the narrative of every children who had not received a health assessment. There was also a clear pathway to children who had declined, and thus the 10% was not the same data each month.
- The percentage of the foster carer's most recent announced visit within timescales was confirmed by the fostering supervising social worker who conducted the visits to the child.
- Though the statistics for the referrals to CAMHS were misleading and desensitised, social workers would make referrals directly from foster carers. With the system heavily relied on CAMHS it was noted that there were concerns on CAMHS support service with other relevant agencies and relevant professionals and this was being reviewed to remodel the provision for better support.

- There were challenges feedback to the service for improvement and better results relating to the performance scorecard.
- The Children Social Care was remodelling their service to better the service gap with foster carers.
- The Chair discussed the advocacy in delivering fostering in-house to support work in foster carers.

The Chair thanked officers for the report.

6/21 Annual Report of Fostering Service and Panel

The Corporate Parenting Panel considered the Annual Report of Fostering Service and Panel and the Review of Fostering Service together with the Escalation Policy for Foster Carers report, which provided an overview of the overall aim of the Fostering Service, providing a range of high quality, safe and aspirational foster placements that met the needs of Children Looked After. The Panel received a detailed overview from the Service Manager of Early Help, Brian Amos.

The Panel welcomed the reports and discussed the report in further detail.

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

- The fostering carer recruitment was brought back to in-house, recruiting a minimum of thirty carers.
- The fostering recruitment had a very good response as the service expanded to team managers with supervising social workers.
- There were 222 fostering households to date and 691 young people placed in a variety of placements in accordance with their care plan.
- 48% of Croydon children in care were placed with in-house foster carers, the remainder were placed with independent fostering agencies (IFA), residential units or in semi-independent accommodation, with some being placed at home with their parents and a number placed for adoption.
- There were a number of carers who had deregistered from fostering, with reason such as ill-health or retirement amongst others.
- The pandemic had impacted the financial difficulties to the fostering service. There were more training and exploring of different ways for better value for money; though there were difficulties in the take up of training.
- The escalation policy and the implications of fostering showed evidence of change and it was highlighted that there was plenty work to do.
- There were 45% of the young children cared for by the independent foster carers. The process acquired every foster carer who had vacancy to be approached and matched, to the needs for the children; if the match was not appropriate there would be no placement.
- The number of Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) carers

commissioned were fifty-one, though the agency had their own fostering social workers as well as the children having their own social worker. The supervising social workers were employed and remunerated by IFA. It was unknown whether there were any ex-council workers employed with the agency. Additionally, the South London Commissioning Programme (SLCP) was working to remove competition and working on a borough basis where the service needed to be more cohesive in addressing what foster carers required and what was not being delivered. With 48% of in-house fostering service, it was deemed that foster carers were not aware of the different types of placements and therefore IFAs were chosen to deliver the service; going forward the Children Social Care was striving for more in-house fostering service than sourcing outside.

Members of the Panel were pleased to learn that Croydon was building a skilled based on foster carers across the borough.

During the consideration of the recommendations, the Panel discussed the following:

- It would be beneficial for connected carers to be introduced at the foster carers association.
- More in-depth information of the child's culture, beliefs and ethnicity needed to be addressed in the assessments to signify the importance of the young person who was being cared for. Cultural genograms had been encouraged in all assessments to celebrate history and culture of a child.
- The Chair added that the key focus on placement stability was also the same in staffing of foster carers working for a local authority or IFAs, to ensure that there was a clear mechanism for communication channels opened between all services, to communicate with workers within Children's Social Care, in particularly the out-of-hours service. Officers advised that there were no known gaps in the efficiency of safeguarding practices provided by foster carers in-house and with the IFAs who also followed service procedure. There were clear protocols in place for working with the out-of-hours service, missing children, allowances, activities, contacts and so forth.

ACTION: For an updated list of names of managers of the Children's Social Care to be circulated with the Panel.

- Members of the Panel highlighted the issue of the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) out-of-hours service, which drew concerns in the past and across the service and should be an area to review in the future in terms of support to foster carers. Further concerns included the missing policy and the clarity of how to record a missing child. Officers noted the challenges and were working very closely with other services to provide a better service in how a missing procedure was applied.

The Chair thanks officers for a very thorough and detailed report.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the two reports.

7/21 Fostering Statement of Purpose

The Corporate Parenting Panel considered the Fostering Statement of Purpose, which provided an overview of the aims and objectives of the service as a whole, and the services and facilities which were provided. The Panel received an overview from the Interim Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care, Roisin Madden.

In response to queries raised by the Panel, the following was clarified.

- The Statement of Purpose focused on foster carers and noted that more information on the child's social worker and structure was needed.

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

8/21 Croydon Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy

The Corporate Parenting Panel considered the Croydon Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy report, which provided an overview of the aims and objectives to improve local foster care placement choice and stability for children and young people in Croydon, particularly for teenagers and children requiring short break care; and to increase the number of in-house foster placements and reduce the use of independent fostering agencies and residential care. The Panel received a detailed overview from the Service Manager of Early Help, Brian Amos.

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

- Following research, the cost of placements were higher in ethnic minority groups nationally and not just within the Croydon borough. The use of the "All About Me" tool helped with placements. It had provided an insight to the child's needs when social workers were looking at placements for a young person, this included religious views and other cultural background to meet the needs of an unaccompanied minor asylum seeking children. With more systems in place, there was more understanding in young people and matching and placement costs of commissioning.
- Recruitment officers had been magnificent during this period in terms of establishing relationships. Fostering agency did support the background of the young people and social workers were relied upon to construct the matching with placements.

During the consideration of the recommendations, the Panel discussed the

following:

- Positive feedback on the referrals made and the “All About Me” tool. With the national trend at a high price tag, on placements, UASC was considered cheaper as there was no family contact.
- It was noted that there was a disproportionality of black children entering the child care system and there was a need to understand the breakdown in placements and whether ethnic minority foster carers were recruited. Officers informed that the service had worked and contributed for ethnic minority work where foster carers benefited from the scheme.
- The discussion led to comments relating to the family group conference which coordinated a systemic practice - the independent person with no connection to the child or the foster carer would help bring together support. This service was deemed successful as the impact included a step down or a case closure or a proceeding of returning to the family or parents, and this was how success was measured.
- Members of the Panel welcomed feedback and contact from the service.

The Chair thanked officers for their report.

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

10/21 How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?

Panel Members welcomed fostering back to in-house, which was a really good uplift as there was more oversight, stability and many benefits. There was also great progress made which had been great.

Panel Members was glad to receive feedback from the foster carers and the young people present at the meeting to help with the progress of work and provide improvements.

Panel Members acknowledged the gaps within the service since after the pandemic. There was a need to understand young people and their needs, what they say though there was more work to do.

Panel Members appreciated the general work Croydon foster carer agency had done which had been productive, services were listening to others though there are still challenges; work provided for children was good.

Panel Members appreciated the Escalation Policy report which was an excellent document.

Panel Members would like for the out-of-hours service to be more efficient and thanked officers for their work with foster carers which was improving the lives of Croydon children. Additionally, Panel Members wanted to see the same relationship from all within the service.

Panel Members addressed the importance of the meetings that are important to children, particularly those needing alternative families.

Panel Members were pleased to hear how young children would use the service, and it was helpful to have the young people literature.

Panel Members continued to address the importance of the voice of the young people and commend the voice from EMPIRE to challenge officers and their reports.

Panel Members welcomed great leadership and communication shown.

11/21 Work Programme

At 7:45pm Councillor Bernadette Khan left the meeting.

The Panel discussed the work programme for the new municipal year and added for the following items to be heard at future Panel meetings:

- Youth Justice;
- CFCA – to also invite foster carers to speak at the end of the annual Corporate Parenting Panel to highlight the work in the year; to also incorporate their work in the Annual Corporate Parenting Panel report;
- Scrutinising housing issues in relation to care leavers;
- Inviting EMPIRE on the work programme and alongside for the Panel to meet with EMPIRE upon invitation to access conversations and celebrations;
- To ensure each report addressed the budget and financial implication;
- To include accommodation strategy and care leavers accommodation to sufficiency.

12/21 Exclusion of the Press and Public

This was not required.

The meeting ended at 7:53pm

Signed:

Date: