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| REPORT TO: | CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL 8 NOVEMBER 2017 |
| SUBJECT: | STRENGTHENING THE CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL |
| LEAD OFFICER: | BARBARA PEACOCK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PEOPLE |
| CABINET MEMBER: | ALISA FLEMMING, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & LEARNING |
| WARDS: | ALL |
| CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT/AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON: | |
| Addressing a number of areas relating to the governance of the Panel is a key action in strengthening the Council's role as a corporate parent and improving outcomes for children in care and care leavers and ensuring that the Panel plays a full role in meeting the authority's corporate parenting duties arising from the Children and Social Work Act 2017. | |
| FINANCIAL IMPACT: | |
| There are no additional costs arising directly from the recommendations in this report. | |

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel is recommended to agree:

- 1.1 That the frequency of Panel meetings be increased to six meetings each municipal year;
- 1.2 That membership of the Panel be extended to include representatives of the Children in Care Council, care leavers, foster carers and health commissioners and that GPAC be recommended to formally approve this;
- 1.3 That an Annual Report be produced and made available to all Members to scrutinise at the Annual Council meeting;
- 1.4 That performance information is routinely reported detailing outcomes for children in care and children leaving care.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 Following the Ofsted inspection of Children's Social Care in Croydon, a review has been undertaken to identify good practice that can be adopted by the Corporate Parenting Panel.
- 2.2 This research is to be considered in tandem with the requirements of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 that sets out a framework of corporate parenting principles for Local Authorities. The recommendations in this paper should also be considered in tandem with proposed changes to the Panel's work programme, which are detailed in a separate report on the agenda.

- 2.3 The report also details proposals for performance information regarding outcomes for children in care and children leaving care to be routinely reported to the Panel.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 While there is no explicit legal requirement for Local Authorities to appoint a Corporate Parenting Panel, many local authorities have established a group of elected members to oversee the corporate parenting function of the local authority and it is widely considered to be good practice.

- 3.2 The general role of Corporate Parenting Panels is to lead on ensuring that a local authority's corporate parenting responsibilities (including multi-agency involvement) are being met in accordance with the Children Act 1989 and subsequent legislation; to set the priorities for children/young people in its care; and to monitor and scrutinise service delivery by reference to the authority's corporate parenting strategy.

- 3.3 Croydon has operated a Corporate Parenting Panel since 2007 that meets four times each municipal year. The Panel's current terms of reference were first agreed in 2010 and were further endorsed in July 2014. Those terms of reference are as follows:

- The Corporate Parenting Panel will focus on improving outcomes for children looked after by Croydon Council
- To monitor performance targets and priorities so far as they relate to children looked after or young people in receipt of leaving care services.
- To monitor the health needs of looked after children, promoting positive engagement of health partners in Corporate Parenting.
- To monitor the education needs of looked after children, promoting positive engagement of education partners in Corporate Parenting.
- To ensure the Council actively promotes opportunities for looked after children across the whole Council.
- To listen to representations from looked after children and young people who are in receipt of services from the Council or from those young people who are care leavers.
- To advise the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services on issues relating to Corporate Parenting Policy.

- 3.4 The membership of the Panel is appointed at Annual Council each year and is currently made up of five administration Members, two opposition Members and two co-opted Members as follows:

- Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care
- Shadow Cabinet Member
- 4 x other administration Members
- 1 x other opposition Member
- Virtual School Head (co-opted)
- LAC Nurse / Doctor (co-opted)

4. THE CHILDREN AND SOCIAL WORK ACT 2017

- 4.1 The Children and Social Work Act became Law in 2017 and sets out a framework of corporate parenting principles that overlay the existing

responsibilities towards looked after children and those leaving care to make clear what it means for the authority as a whole to act as a good parent.

4.2 The Act introduces seven principles of corporate parenting which local authorities must have regard to for looked after children or care leavers, whether or not they are or were the local authority looking after the child.

4.3 The seven principles are to have regard to:

- the need to act in the best interests of, and to promote the health and well-being of relevant children and young people;
- the need to encourage relevant children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- the need to take account of a relevant child or young person's views, wishes and feelings;
- the need to help relevant children and young people to gain access to and get the best use of the services provided by the local authority and its partners;
- the need to promote high aspirations amongst relevant children and young people and the need to secure the best outcomes;
- the need for relevant children and young people to be safe and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- the need to prepare relevant children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

4.4 In considering any improvements to the arrangements of the Corporate Parenting Panel, Members should have regard to these seven principles and be satisfied that any proposed changes support these expectations.

5. RESPONDING TO OFSTED FINDINGS AND MOVING TO BEST PRACTICE

5.1 Following the recent inspection of Children's Social Care in Croydon, one of Ofsted's recommendations, recommendation 20, was to:

"Ensure that elected members, as corporate parents, prioritise and focus on improving all areas of poor practice for children looked after and care leavers".

5.2 Specific comments in the Ofsted report included:

"The corporate parenting panel has been effective in championing some issues that have led to better outcomes for children looked after, for example improved placement stability and access to education, employment and training. The corporate parenting panel expresses a commitment to improving the lives of children. However, the local authority overall has not prioritised and planned sufficiently to improve outcomes for enough children".

"The lead member for children and young people, as the chair of the corporate parenting panel, actively engages with children and advocates on their behalf. Changes to the corporate parenting panel mean that all children across the borough can become involved in topic-based discussions. As a result, the panel has been effective in championing some issues for children and young people. For example, last year young people were part of a 'takeover' of the scrutiny committee, during which they explored housing issues for young people.

“However, the panel is not sufficiently focused on poor performance and the practice priorities in the improvement plan. More work is also required to engage the Children in Care Council. A new draft engagement strategy is currently being debated and refined, which will begin to take these issues forward and further develop children’s involvement in scrutiny and the cabinet. At the time of the inspection, Croydon was hosting a youth congress to debate young people’s engagement, at which there were over 200 delegates”.

- 5.3 The overall response to Recommendation 20 clearly needs to be far reaching and will extend beyond just the Corporate Parenting Panel. For instance, further training and empowerment of all Members in the role of corporate parent has already begun, with training from the LGA delivered to a meeting of all Members on 16 October and bespoke LGA training for Scrutiny Chairs, along with induction and routine training for Members being put in place through the work of the Member Learning and Development Panel.
- 5.4 In order to identify areas where the Panel can improve, research has been undertaken to benchmark the Panel against both ‘good’ and ‘outstanding’ authorities.
- 5.5 This research considered the characteristics and traits that Ofsted has highlighted in regard to Corporate Parenting Panels or their equivalents and identified a number of changes that could be made to improve Croydon’s Panel.
- 5.6 Those changes include:
- That the frequency of Panel meetings be increased to six meetings each municipal year;
 - That membership of the Panel be extended to include representatives of the Children in Care Council, care leavers, foster carers and health commissioners;
 - That an Annual Report be produced and made available to all Members to scrutinise at the Annual Council meeting;
 - That performance information is routinely reported detailing outcomes for children in care and children leaving care.
- 5.7 The Panel is recommended to agree these changes and should they be agreed, the General Purposes and Audit Committee will be asked to formally ratify the additional membership of the panel.

6. DEVELOPING A PERFORMANCE SCORECARD FOR THE PANEL

- 6.1 It is proposed that a children in care performance scorecard is produced for the benefit of the Corporate Parenting Panel. The scorecard will cover all aspects of our corporate parenting responsibilities, including health and education, with updated performance figures being prepared for each meeting of the Panel.
- 6.2 Each of the key performance indicators (KPIs) will be rag rated into red, amber and green bandings based on benchmarking with national comparator figures. Where indicators are banded as red, exception reporting will be provided with an analysis of the underlying causes for the poor performance and the remedial actions which are being taken.
- 6.3 A draft of the proposed CIC scorecard is attached as appendix A.
- 6.4 Current performance is variable across the indicators. Overall, numbers of looked after children in Croydon remain stable at around the 780 mark. However, within these figures, we are seeing a reduction in unaccompanied asylum seeking children (-42) and an increase in the numbers of local children (+40). This increase is a consistent pattern within authorities which have had a poor Ofsted outcome.
- 6.5 Key strengths within our current performance are good placement stability and consistency of social work support. Adoption performance is consistent and outcomes for care leavers are generally good, with significant numbers going into further and higher education.
- 6.6 Our key vulnerabilities at present relate to regularity of reviews, medicals and updating of personal education plans (PEPs). The underlying factors for the poor performance in these areas are being analysed, and further detail and resulting actions will be provided to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

7. COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL SOLICITOR AND MONITORING OFFICER

The Solicitor to the Council comments that.....

Approved by: ((name) head oflaw/ interim head oflaw) on behalf of the Director of Law and Monitoring Officer

CONTACT OFFICER: Philip Segurola, Interim Director, Early Help and Children's Social Care

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: None