

## **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel held on Wednesday, 3 July 2019 at 5.00 pm in F10,  
Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

### **MINUTES**

**Present:** Councillors Shafi Khan, Janet Campbell, Bernadette Khan, Jerry Fitzpatrick and Maria Gatland

#### **Co-optee Members**

Foster Carers: Angela Christmas, Manny Kwamin and Martin Williams

Virtual School: Shelley Davies and Sarah Bailey

Care Leaver: Ashleigh Searle

#### **Also**

**Present:** Nick Pendry (Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care)  
Vanessa Strang (Head of Corporate Parenting)  
Jennifer Wade (Head of School Place Planning and Admissions, Commissioning and Procurement)  
Adam Fearon-Stanley (Independent Reviewing Officer Service Manager)  
Dionne Sang (Consultant Practitioner, Early Help and Children's Social Care)

**Apologies:** Councillors Alisa Flemming, Bernadette Khan and Helen Redfern

### **PART A**

#### **23/19 Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 6 March 2019 were agreed as an accurate record.

#### **24/19 Disclosures of interest**

There were none.

#### **25/19 Urgent Business (if any)**

There was none.

#### **26/19 Update on actions agreed at previous meeting(s)**

There was no update on actions agreed at the previous meeting.

## **27/19 Children in Care Performance Scorecard**

The Head of Corporate Parenting spoke of the performance scorecard and shared with the Panel that since the last meeting there had been improvements in key areas.

Children Services was aiming to set higher aspirations for the Looked After Children, in particularly around the foster carers annual reviews and child visits. The area of difficulty fell within the personal education plans (PEPs) and the initial health assessments.

The Panel heard that staff had made progress in addressing concerns within the service for significant improvement. For example, the initial health assessment was to be channelled through the Health and Wellbeing Strategy Board, and although there was more work to be completed, to have improvement within the social work practice was the target.

Officers shared that one area of improvement had been reviewing of health assessments, which was the initial stage when a child comes into contact with Children's Services. This was a key priority for the service to achieve a better outcome. It was also important that the service assessed issues very early to avoid drift and delay. The improvement in this area was due to the growing number of staff in the service. Officers noted that improvements being achieved had not reflected in the report presented, as there had not been an update since May.

The Panel welcomed the changes, which had been ongoing. There was pleasure taken in the improvements within the service specifically with the PEPs and health assessments. Credit was awarded to the Virtual School Service which had worked hard to achieve a better service performance. Conversely, the Panel raised concerns about indicators that needed improvement.

Further discussion from the Panel highlighted the statutory obligation for pathway plans that was not being met and that more work was to be done to reach targets as 18% of care leavers were eligible for a pathway plan. Pathway plans for children were required at the age of 16 years and 3 months, which had been amended from previous months. Pathway plans were not the same as care plans.

Officers informed the Panel that the service had been working hard on improving figures and had seen an improvement with figures over 85%, which had been their target.

In response to questions from Members of the Panel in relation to the standard and quality of PEPs, officers informed that they had undertaken a social worker survey, and the feedback received highlighted that their relationship with the Education team had strengthened and improved immensely. This was demonstrated by the service working better together in

completing PEPs. This had proven very helpful for the service, and had helped support the services' processes and their journey of improvement.

In response to questions from Members of the Panel concerning the quality assurance of pathway plans, officers highlighted that the process had several layers. These included the social worker co-producing the plan with their young person before a team manager would review it. Pathway plans were formally reviewed at the young person's six-monthly review and each update or change in a child's life was also reviewed. Officers shared that the service was introducing an audit programme, which would also be another layer of quality assurance. The auditing programme would see two types of auditing, one from an external independent reviewer and another from an internal audit within the service. This was to get a greater understanding of how things could improve.

Comments from the Co-optee Members of the Panel shared that from their experience, young people did not understand the importance of a pathway plan as it was not very clear, and was seen as more of a "tick box exercise". Consequently, more exposure was encouraged around pathway plans for young people to understand why and what the information was for them and how it would relate to their future. Life stories would also help the young person to see what their life would look like. Officers informed that the service was developing a care leaver's forum, which was proposed to commence in September. This would be used to develop a new design for the Croydon pathway plan making it a user friendly and meaningful document.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the Children's Performance Dashboard.

## **28/19 Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report**

The Independent Reviewing Officer Service Manager spoke to the report and shared with the Panel that the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service had worked very hard over the year with higher demands and service improvements. The service achieved 87% of its 95% target.

Officers informed that the service had been working with their Camden partners, having had four sessions to date. These addressed the way in which management, supervision, connection and resolutions within the service could be improved.

Officers shared that there were challenges that the service experienced throughout the year, and the recruitment of new staff, which affected capacity, saw that improvements within the service were being achieved.

The Panel heard that the service had made progress over the year in encouraging a better relationship between social workers and IROs, which started in August last year. The IRO Service had developed better relationships by setting up monthly workshops for new staff and service expectations in working together had been set.

Other highlights saw Looked After Children (LAC) Reviews reviewed. These were at a stage where in the last six months the IRO Service had been more effective, this included who the reports were distributed to and the regularity of the LAC Reviews.

There were discussions taking place relating to MOMO. Officers further highlighted that there was to be a launch of an App for children following consultation and that EMPIRE was involved with the consultation. The Panel heard that the App was proposed to be launched and trialled in September and this was an exciting development and an alternative way for social workers to work with their young person with their LAC Reviews. The App was also seen as a much wider function to feed into other meetings such as Child Protection Conferences, Child in Need Meetings, Personal Education Plan Meetings and Family Group Conferences.

Members of the Panel discussed the work of the IRO Service and how it was quality assured. Officers informed that the service was working with colleagues to resolve any concerns that had been raised, including understanding the IRO role and talking to staff, which also helped the service work together and gain a better outcome.

Officers informed that overall the service had improved.

Members of the Panel welcomed the great analysis of the report, which was more positive from last year. Members also welcomed the positive comments from foster carers.

In response to questions from the Panel on the attendance of a looked after child's birth family at the reviews, officers informed that the service was mindful of the sensitivity of various cases; and following feedback from the IRO survey, birth parents had been happy with the quality of service provided to their children.

In response to questions from the Panel regarding the interaction between a child and their IRO, officers highlighted that the interaction should give a child the opportunity to address their concern. The interaction was quality assured as managers had oversight during supervision. This was another way to acknowledge any concerns raised. Further, there was an expectation that the IRO would meet with the young person before any LAC Review. This meeting would help to strengthen their relationship. Co-optee Members highlighted that the IRO does visit children and that they were seeing positive changes.

In response to questions from the Panel on the timeframe of LAC Reviews, officers clarified that a copy of the decisions from a LAC Review would be sent out by the service administrator and should be received within five working days, followed by the full minutes within twenty to thirty working days.

In response to questions from the Panel relating to a bespoke App rather than different Apps, officers informed this had been reviewed and effectively did

not work. It was highlighted that young people were positive about the use of the Mind of My Own (MOMO) App although there were still teething problems. Panel Members suggested for the App to be more user friendly as there were concerns about the appropriateness of some animation or graphics as well as its effectiveness, when logged into the App. There were a few challenges relating to the consultation and there was further in-depth discussion of the consultation and the re-naming of the App.

Officers clarified that there were two types of MOMO: *MOMO1* was aimed at children aged eight and above; and *MOMO Express* was designed for children with learning disability to cater for different levels of understanding. MOMO itself was not an approach for translation and that further support would come from their social worker. Further questions from Panel Members drew concerns about the challenges a young person could face with not having access to a mobile phone or a language barrier, and also whether there were other safeguarding concerns. Officers confirmed that the App had cost £28,000 for the year and was accessible on any device. Panel Members heard that every child would be able to have their own account as all communication was to be channelled to a central point and sent to the social work team. Therefore, there would be an oversight of the App. Officers further informed that the App was not to replace communication, it was seen as an opportunity to engage with the children in a different way.

In response to questions from the Panel relating to scrutinising staff and colleagues, officers shared that being an IRO included understanding the position and role in working with social workers and team managers. This would have a big impact on how staff and colleagues would respond to a situation and determine what was best for the child. The service was on an improvement journey as communication was better throughout the service.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report.

*At 6:23pm the Panel adjourned the meeting for a short break  
At 6:32pm the Panel reconvened the meeting.*

## **29/19 Update on South London Commissioning Programme**

The Head of Commissioning and Procurement introduced the report to the Panel and summarised that the focus of commissioning had always been around the young person. The South London Commissioning Programme (SLCP) was comprised of twelve boroughs. Croydon had been privileged to host two active projects that looked at placements for children with special needs including value for money, and secondly, the quality assurance of how providers ensured a consistent service. In addition to the projects, there was also joint commissioning for residential placements and fostering agency.

The Panel heard that the highlights of the SLCP included the increased placements that were provided for looked after children. This was a result of good planning and better sufficiency. Officers had been transparent in what the borough needed and what they wanted in partnership going forward as they worked closely with their providers.

Officers informed that the Light Joint Commissioning Framework was to be launched in March 2020, and with the collective spend in the region this would make a huge difference to Croydon.

*At 6:44pm Councillor Janet Campbell attended the meeting*

The service was focusing on Looked After Children having heard the 'voice of a child'. There was now a PAN London Commission group where the SLCP would be developed and it was agreed for this programme to run further for another year.

The Chair acknowledged the service's great work, which was evidenced.

With questions from the Panel relating to the achievements of the SLCP to date and how the investment was quantified, officers informed that the programme started with SEND funding, and the £1.7 million grant funding from Education was given for growth.

With questions from the Panel relating to the concerns of moving a child mid-placement, officers informed that a social worker's decision of where a child should be placed would have oversight from Children's Services. To add, officers highlighted that the SLCP underwent a review looking at a cohort of thirty-seven (4%) of looked after children in placements, and saw that the children were all in the right placements. Therefore, the decision-making would always be based around the child's need and how the service could assess their need. Further, the Panel heard that there was an internal mechanism should there be a need for a child to move placements mid-placement, and a discussion to establish whether the move was required would take place. The Panel learned that the decision-making would always remain within Children's Social Care. Key performance indicators highlighted how settled and stable children were in placements and the service found that they needed to improve stability.

With further questions from the Panel relating to residential placements and the difference between in-house and the commissioning service, officers confirmed that all residential placements were made through independent fostering agencies. Officers informed that providing placements from in-house was a lot cheaper than using the commissioning service but it was not always a cheaper option. Finding placements through the commissioning service often had social workers not knowing who the details of the third party. Finding placements in-house was always a first port of call before the service extended their search using the commissioning service that provided residential placements elsewhere and out of borough. For children with multiple complex needs, the service was fortunate to have a different number

of other placements to cater for all. Officers informed Panel Members that their number one priority would be to place Croydon's looked after children with the borough's foster carers. As part of the community and working in partnership, it was for exceptional circumstances that a child would be placed outside of the borough.

The advantages of joint commissioning were that local authorities would be able to share concerns very quickly regarding any provider or residential home having the information-sharing forum was seen as a positive development.

The funding element within the report set out the Croydon spend and the collective spend over the twelve boroughs. The aim was to reduce current spending.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the progress that had been made so far in relation to the South London Commissioning Programme.

### **30/19 Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2018/19**

The Head of Corporate Parenting spoke to the annual report of the Corporate Parenting Panel for the year 2018/19. This annual report would be the first of the kind for this Panel. The report summarised the work the Panel had achieved and provided further background to the Looked after Children Services and the Leaving Care Team.

Officers shared the highlights of the year:

- That the priorities set by the Panel had been implemented and achieved;
- EMPIRE was born and their engagement as a group had grown( the involvement of EMPIRE members in Panel meetings was also an achievement);
- There had been two reviews of the fostering service

In response to questions, Panel Members were informed that this report was drafted in accordance with the Constitution and needed to go to Full Council for consideration.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to approve the Corporate Parenting Draft Annual Report 2018/19.

### **31/19 How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?**

The Panel highlighted the following accomplishments and discussed changes to help Children in Care. This included:

- Looking at education for children looked after, their aspirations and how the service were supporting children going for higher education.

- Following up on the comments and issues made by the young person and EMIPRE representatives.
- Comments were made about making sure EMPIRE representatives were invited and prepared for Panel meetings going forward as their absence was noted and missed.
- Comments were made pertaining to education attainment, which should be an ambition/aspiration that all should have for the young children.
- Comments were made for an extended invitation for designated teachers to attend Panel meetings.
- Panel Members would like to see responsibility in challenging more to achieve better outcomes for the young children.

Unanimous comments were shared regarding the way in which all services communicate with each other, to show stability and teamwork within all services in supporting looked after children.

**32/19 Exclusion of the Press and Public**

This was not required.

The meeting ended at 7:49pm

**Signed:**

**Date:**

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