

## Corporate Parenting Panel

Meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel held on Tuesday, 29 September 2020 at 5.00pm. This meeting will be held virtually.

### MINUTES

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

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

**Co-optee Members:**

Virtual School: Shelley Davies, Sarah Bailey

EMPIRE: Suzanne, Louisa (care leavers) and Porsha Robinson (Youth Service Coordinator – Council staff)

Care Leaver Representative; Ashleigh Searle

Foster Carer Representatives: Angela Christmas, Manny Kwamin

**Also**

**Present:**

Councillor Janet Campbell

Councillor Robert Ward (Chair of the Scrutiny Children and Young People Sub-Committee)

Nick Pendry (Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care)

Rodica Cobarzan (Head of Service - Social Work with Children Looked After and Carer Leavers)

Sara Lewis (Children's Housing Representative)

**Apologies:**

**Co-optee Members:**

Health: Connie Ikhifa

Health Commissioners: Pasquale Brammer, Roneeta Butler-Campbell and Laura Saunders

### PART A

**24/20 Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 29 September 2020 were agreed as an accurate record.

**25/20 Disclosures of interest**

There were none.

**26/20 Urgent Business (if any)**

There was none.

**27/20 Terms of Reference**

The Chair made note to the terms of reference prior to the Ofsted inspection. Members of the Panel discussed the potential additional role of safeguarding representative to attend the Panel meetings. It was noted that the Child Protection Sub-Committee existed under the Independence Board framework, where working together policy sets out the relationship of working with partners.

**28/20 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 March 2020:

1 – The pathway plans for future reports, what was being measured and how up to date the pathway plans were, officers informed that every eligible young person must have a pathway plan updated every six months.

2 – To address the issue of pathway plan for a smooth transition, officers informed that there was a new pathway plan that captured better the voice of young people and work was underway with staff and carers to better support transitions.

The foster carer co-optee commented that the definition on the appropriate accommodation for care leavers, and Shared Life was essential for SEN and those on special needs. The Chair added that young people previously spoke about opportunities to Staying Put. Officers informed that that Shared Life was a true assessment of a child and their needs and this was where the carer lived. The Shared Life scheme was within every local authority and was used to assess eligibility of the criteria of which children would be entitled to the Shared Life scheme. This was generous and not much lower in payments for fostering.

Panel Members commented on the pathway planning which was statutory in a young person's journey and emphasised that the dashboard needed to provide a more detailed data and information of what needed to be reviewed.

## **29/20 Children in Care Performance Scorecard**

The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care and the Head of Social Work, Children Looked After and Care Leavers spoke to the report, and had summarised the performance scorecard in detailed. In summary:

**Children in care:** Officers informed that the numbers of looked after children had reduced within the last six months, and there was also a reduction of unaccompanied asylum seeking children in care. The number of children returned home and no longer looked after had decreased.

**Visits:** Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the number of home visits had fluctuated and much of the visits were being held virtually. In September a decision was made for the return of face-to-face visits.

**Performance:** Officers highlighted the major issues and challenges within the care planning service where the service continued to underperform. Pathway plans and care plans needed to be completed within six months, which was an issue within the service. There was auditing of cases across the services and officers had noticed improvements in the quality of practice, and though this was good, there was room for more quality and compliance.

**Health assessments:** Officers informed that the review health assessments and initial health assessments had been impacted due to consent from parents. There was lack of consent from children placed out of borough and young people were declining assessments. It was said that foster carers could work more with young children around this.

**Fostering:** The foster care service had improved and remained stable, and the number of foster carers was similar to the numbers at the beginning of last year to date.

**Adoption:** The adoption service was now formed as part of the regional agency along with eight other boroughs and this was working very well. Officers highlighted that the service had eleven children placed in adoption.

**Care Leavers:** Officers highlighted of similar issues where the service had more room for quality improvement. It was noted that with regards to pathway plan the scorecard measured the pathway plan from 18 to 25 years, though the pathway was not legally required from 22 years of age unless planned. Since April, care leavers were continuingly being supported by staff who enquired of services they required as care leavers also had a need.

**Housing and accommodation:** There had been a lot of work with the commission and housing department close to a young person's 18th birthday. Officers informed that they had placed eleven young people in social housing as opposed to last year where there was a low number of just one young person placed in social housing. This was a significant improvement.

The Panel discussed the information they heard and a number of questions and comments was put forward to officers.

The care leaver representative raised questions on the reduction of numbers of children in care and wanted clarity on whether the reduction was due to early intervention, and also whether the coronavirus pandemic was addressed as the number of children in care was proportionally higher; officers responded that there was more flexibility in working with families to meet the needs of the young person. The service was down in numbers and they were working effectively to affect change.

Further questions regarding suitable accommodation for a young person on their 21st birthday was asked, and officers informed that a young person was often provided with an appropriate accommodation. The use of a semi-independent accommodation was not considered appropriate as the objective was to embed the idea of a family home a young person can reside in. Officers further informed the Panel on the legal requirement, which was very low and was measured on a scorecard. The Panel heard that social workers and their young person were together to seek what was considered their ideal suitable accommodation. Housing options could increase as figures in price was lower than neighbouring boroughs, and the shared life accommodation was further mentioned as an alternative option.

The Panel would like to see a comparative as the numbers was not portraying a true picture. The Children's Housing Representative spoke to the Panel advising that their service worked closely with children services. She informed that young people aged 17 and 18 if very independent, would receive a 1-bed/studio property to their needs. An area of support network was always taken into consideration to ensure what the young person had was appropriate. Housing options in general was specifically for care leavers.

Panel Members commended the work around PEPs which had done very well. There was concern that the children looked after health assessment and pathway plans was persistently in need of improvement, and raised questions to whether there was changes to threshold in assessments. Officers responded that the service was less firm and fast on threshold, and focused more on working with families to support change. This included the team visiting families out of working hours two or three times a week to support families. The purpose for this was to support change and resources available for threshold decisions, though this area needed improvement to push for progress. Officers further noted that indicators were red, and that they were working very hard to change this improvement, quality and performance and staffing. All staff within the service was now permanent, and this stability was hopeful to better performance.

Panel Members questioned the health assessments, noticing the very low numbers, the reduction in children looked after (CLA) figures and also wanted to understand why the local children had reduced whether this was due to lack of visits. Officers informed that there were some young people over the coronavirus pandemic lockdown who were not seen. The rate of taking

children into care post lockdown had also not increased, and this was being looked into further. There was fifty-four local children noted that required accommodation. Historically, there had been more care proceedings, though this had reduced as the service was proactively working with families, and thus the numbers were not substantial to investigate.

Further questions on the availability of the 2021 targets was requested, and the Chair confirmed that the targets were set with the Improvement Board with the improvement journey. Officers added that the service reviewed the targets and set them looking for realistic targets.

The Chair noted the challenges within the service and highlighted that there should be a focus on reducing numbers coming into care.

The Chair of the Scrutiny Children and Young People Sub-Committee was present at the Panel meeting and participated in the discussion, highlighting that the challenges within the service was raised at the last Children's Scrutiny meeting, where there were a number of children in care unseen, particularly children in need (CIN) children. Escalation was having to understand accessibility since lockdown, which was currently unknown.

**ACTION: To inform the Panel of the CLA figures relating to health assessments to next panel meeting.**

Panel Members further raised questions on suitable accommodation within the borough and other resources or opportunity sites such as the Croydon Park Hotel to address the housing needs of the leaving care system. It was noted that the Croydon Park Hotel had been considered and the need for temporary accommodation felt at this stage was pressing. Officers added that there was a reflection on the vulnerability of the young person and consuming too many young people in the same place. Having dedicated flats in new builds had been discussed with the housing department for young people to be part of the community, which would be an ongoing promotion for our care leavers.

Members further commented for care leavers to be on the dashboard to have a measurement on their destination. Further comments of the lack of support given to young people on their journey to university was discussed and Members would like to see change.

**ACTION: To update the Panel with data relating to support given to young people in universities.**

## **30/20 Exam Results, Exclusion and SEN**

This item was adjourned to be heard at the November Panel meeting.

**31/20 Engagement Achievement (inc. complaints and leaving care opportunities)**

This item was adjourned to be heard at the November Panel meeting.

**32/20 Annual Report of Virtual School**

The Head of Virtual School spoke to the report and shared that within the last six months in education, things had been different to what was considered normal. Within the report was information for the whole of the last year.

Some of the highlights from the virtual school included the PEPs which exceeded their targets for 2019/20 and was quality assured as 'outstanding'; and the youth funds had seen five young person or a looked after child start in the Leaving Care Academy as apprentices. They would directly be involved with the panel and other parts of the service, and this was a proud moment. The work was broadly in line with Key Stage 4. The cohort was a different group many with additional needs.

There was also outstanding results with the younger children who ranked second overall nationally for Key Stage 1-2 progress; and eighteen young people was confirmed to be going to university.

Panel Members congratulated the work achieved by the Virtual School. It was a celebratory to students achieving such great work within the society. Though there were positive compliments to the virtual school, it was noted that there were two young person who were permanently excluded due to extreme circumstances. Members enquired of the extreme circumstances reported in the report and the subsequent pathway provided to the young person. Officers informed that the exclusion was a consequence to a large public disturbance within a criminal nature, and thus it was difficult for the two young persons involved to remain within the school safely. Members wanted clarification that students who were looked after were not managed by that process.

The care leaver representative commended on the young people acknowledging that the current pandemic did not affect their performance in education, which was a great achievement. Comments were made regarding the proposed apprentices to ensure that the care leavers were supported, seen and treated as professionals and not treated any different, due to their experience. Officers informed that they were working with the youth service coordinator around the recruitment for apprentices to ensure young people do not have a negative experience.

The foster career representative also noted the good work achieved from virtual school in looked after children and summer events that took place. This was a two-hour face to face event that was only offered to school year 11; and though it was a missed opportunity for the young people of all ages to benefit from this, it was understandable. Reflecting the report, it was noted that the

virtual school were able to support children particularly vulnerable. There were two cases where children were not able to attend school during the lockdown and this needed to be added to the chart within their report to reflect a true picture especially if virtual school was involved. Officers welcomed the information shared to review in further detail.

Further comments included the notion that virtual school teachers working from home and was able to complete PEPS, but also foster carer was helping to educate children at home, and those carers who accommodated unaccompanied asylum seeking children found it difficult to help and support. Further support and face to face teaching would have helped foster carers who were struggling. It was also a highlight as some of the carers turned into full-time teachers.

Virtual school were also working on individual packs for students in preparation for another possible pandemic lockdown. Officer further informed that the review of foster carers was in progress and officers were reviewing how carers could receive direct support. There was a proposal for a cohort of 17 young people who needed more support. Virtual school taught some of the young people and a lot of resourcing was shared with the young people who in return was overwhelmed. Going forward, officers would have audit for foster carers' experience around this work.

Panel Members welcomed the good comprehensive report provided and again appreciated the good work virtual school had achieved over the years. Members addressed the great comments recorded by Ofsted and appreciated the young people who had worked so hard throughout the year and during the pandemic. The challenges noted within the report was the attendance of young people, and Panel Members questioned whether the poor attendance was during the difficult pandemic period or whether it was an issue during school. Officers responded that attendance had been a concern prior to the coronavirus pandemic. Though this issue was small and a significance for attendance at school, it was a high issue against the national cohort. Officers were undertaking a more detailed piece around tracking, which had been followed closely. Some had thrived during lockdown and remained in better places than previously, and officers were looking at slow progress as they returned. Officers further informed that PEPs and targets were in place, achievement and attendance in school was a key focus as well as PEPs.

The Chair appreciated hearing testimonies first hand from foster carers and young persons who had a transformative and opportunity in education, and also teachers, young persons and foster carers building relationships with each other. Further, the Chair commended the team and their hard work with the PEP.

**33/20 Mentoring and Careers Guidance for Looked After Children and Care Leavers Mentoring and Independent Visitor work**

The Head Teacher of Virtual School speak to the report.

The report drew a number of different strands and scheme across the council; independent visitor's services and the largest number of young persons have mentors. With the virtual service mentoring scheme, there were nineteen mentors trained, some from council and others from local business who met with their young person weekly across the year to help. Officers further informed that the mentoring continued during the coronavirus pandemic, though there was a small number due to referrals. The young people part of the scheme had positive things to say about the mentoring service.

In response to Panel Members questions relating to the low numbers of looked after children not having mentors, whether they know how to ask for a mentor, and whether there is enough adults to take on the role, officers informed that there were enough volunteers to help take on the mentoring role. Social workers would advertise the mentoring with their young person, however, the low numbers had been a result to some young people having a lot of adults in their life and may not require any further adults for additional support, though there were some young people who did require additional support. Officers noted that there had not been a huge uptake for mentoring and there were additional options offered.

Further comments was shared by the Panel informing that the youth service needed clarity for the mentoring programme to know what was best suited for the young people. Panel Members wanted to see more complaints covered within the report. Officers acknowledged the comments and what needed to be followed up.

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

### **34/20 How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?**

- Comments were made that there were many committees and panels overlapping and also with new government arrangement. With regards to the RAG rating, there was a lot of overlapping and Panel Members would like to see a pathway with more clarity to who was doing what to avoid duplication.
- There were consensus comments that it would be useful to have joint meeting in terms of government review to comment on, with a small of people to discuss.
- Comments of sharing and holding officers in account to education and mainstream, and observing the fantastic work achieved and also suitable accommodation around this.
- Comments on the challenges that had come forward though the pathway plans and an earlier challenge from last meeting relating to driving the aspirations around young people, and aims for university

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and beyond, had been beneficial to hear and push back from the Panel.

**35/20 Work Programme**

This item was adjourned to be heard at the November Panel meeting.

**36/20 Exclusion of the Press and Public**

This was not required.

The meeting ended at 7.06pm

**Signed:**

**Date:**

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