

Corporate Parenting Panel

Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on Wednesday, 13 January 2021 at 5.02pm. This meeting was 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

CLA Designated Health Professionals: Fiona Simmons

Health Commissioners: Roneeta Campbell-Butler

EMPIRE: Porsha Robinson

Foster Carer Representatives: Angela Christmas

Also

Present: Nick Pendry (Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care)
Rodica Cobarzan (Head of Social Work with Children Looked After and Care Leavers)
Natalie Craig (Service Manager, Childrens Social Care)

Apologies: Co-optee Members: Health Commissioners and Care Leaver Representative

PART A

1/21 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 24 November 2020 and Thursday 10 December 2020 were agreed as an accurate record.

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 no actions from the previous meeting.

Children in Care Performance Scorecard

Officers present spoke to the November performance scorecard highlighting that there had been no significant changes, though it was positive to note that there were less red indicators on the scorecard this time than the last report presented at the panel in December 2020.

In summary, officers pointed out that there were continuous issues around the pathway plan and highlighted a 6% increase between October and November performance. Officers acknowledged that there was more work to do to improve the performance. The other red indicator within the performance scorecard was related to the care leaver's education training and employment. Officers addressed that the significant difficulties around this was partly due to the pandemic situation that caused challenging conditions to work with young people, though efforts were put in place to engage with the young people for training or education. There were other indicators that did not have a target and this was pending to be set by the Improvement Board.

Panel Members commented on the low percentage of the health assessments which had dropped to 50%, and the assessments conducted had also dropped to 50%, and asked officers for more information to this change. Officers advised that a variety of factors would have contributed to these changes such as a number of new social workers who did not understand process and another factor was not receiving consent. With regards to the decline of the health assessments the issue with services receiving correct information to follow through with the referral was often the delay in assessments not being completed timely.

Further comments relating to the health assessment was discussed with the foster carer co-optee representative adding that the process and communication needed to be improved as it was essential for an assessment to be carried out within three days. Officers recognised that there was often difficulty in meeting deadlines and information were missed and this was to be improved. The service managed weekly meetings between health services, there were also champions groups that met weekly ensuring assessments were completed. With part of the improvement, these things were to be tracked on a weekly basis.

Other areas of concern raised by Panel Members was the pathway plans that was still a red indicator, and officers informed that there was a number of issues linked with the pathway in the computer systems when updating pathway plans. Timeliness and updates were sitting in draft by it is to make sure it was followed in a timely way. Staff themselves do make complaints on this. Officers reflected on the challenges the service had over the last few months with financial implications and changes within the senior staffing particularly since the pandemic as morale was low, and gave assurance that the service was working very hard with the resources available to provide the best service and performance.

Panel Members acknowledged the pressures currently held within the service.

In regards to the indicator CLA21, Panel Members commended the low numbers and queried on whether the cohort was the same children. Officers informed that there was a small cohort, and the biggest number was linked in having custodial sentences, most have been in custody or in placements since the aged from seventeen.

The Panel noted the two red indicators within the performance scorecard, and gave recognition to what had been done, additionally it was good for the Panel to focus on the red and amber indicators in detail.

Panel Members also looked further to the performance and the data from Annex A in relation to indicator AD7 of the report, and officers informed that the figures related to the children placed on the adoption for a long time had improved significantly in performance and was in line with the statistics with their neighbours. In terms of children moving, the length of time between adoptions was two-hundred days, which was well under England numbers and was very good for the service over the last three years. Panel Members discussed further the granting of placement orders and placement was an average of two-hundred days, and noted that care proceedings on average could take up to a year. Officers informed that there was a low number of care proceedings that was completed after nineteen months, though the majority were completed within twenty-six weeks. Further officers addressed that with the care proceedings, the courts were more inclined for children and parents to live together meaning more assessments. Also, due to the pandemic there was an impact in assessing parents post birth therefore it could take longer than twenty-six weeks to complete, and there was allowances for a delay in the assessments.

ACTION: To provide data of the average time between the granting of a placement order and the date the child was made subject to an adoption order.

The Chair thanked officers for the report.

6/21 Summary of ALS Adoption activity

Officers present spoke to the report and informed that the local authority joined the Adopt London South (ALS) as a result of a decision to join regional. In detail they informed that Southwark was the house borough and Croydon was one of four in the region to join.

The report presented covered first full year of adopters and its operation. In summary, the service had transferred of a number of staff. The ALS function was to recruit and provide adoption services of prospective adopters. Children Services however retained the corporate parenting agency and decision making responsibilities for the best interest decision for children who were believed to need a plan of adoption and also the match between adopters and

a child. Children's Services also retained the responsibility for the permanency planning and paying adoption allowances. Croydon was currently paying 17% of the funding for the next two years of ALS and was the biggest local authority within the ALS.

Officers further provided the Panel with statistics and addressed that the sufficient of adopters had remained the same though targets set were not met. At the time of completion there were:

- Twenty-one families being assessed, though ALS do prioritise applications for families who met the needs of ALS.
- Forty-one children waited over a year before ASL started of which some have now been matched. Out of the fifty, thirty-eight were under the age of two which was a significant amount.
- Babies on average waited one hundred and twelve days, and for all children over six years old waited over one thousand days.
- There was also a longer average waiting time for the minority ethnicity groups too than for children of white European heritage.
- The average waiting time has been reduced by four days since ASL was initiated
- There had been seven early permanence in ALS. This data represented how long it was between children in care and a placement order with those children who were in their permanence placement.
- There had been over one thousand requests for post adoption support where additional work was undertaken to increase capacity and also the challenges during the pandemic.

The service worked closely with ASL to ensure high quality plans for support during adoption with the view to improve waiting time for ethnic minority groups and increase ethnic minority group adopters, improve early permanence planning, recruit local adopters for London children, support approved adopters who could not be matched with a child from another local authority, increase significantly the capacity for post adoption support and improve the way data and systems were shared.

Panel Members appreciated the report presented and looked forward to the annual report upon completion. They then discussed the whole report in detail and raised questions and provided comments.

Panel Members noted the partnership agreements indicating the protocols put in place when there was a breakdown in the home. Further, Panel Members requested for information on the procedure and timescales of completion, what the future implications for the budget control in terms of best value, as Croydon were the highest contributors. Officers stated that as the service retained responsibility for the child, and that the procedure in place for breakdown in the placement would remain exactly the same as before though they would be working with the ALS and adoption agency. Officers further informed that they had the biggest numbers of CLA which was why there was a partnership agreement. There was monthly meetings held to consider options, what was found, resources available and how money was best spent. The budget was set as it was reviewed on a yearly basis.

Panel Members discussed the protocol and the importance of the process and was disappointed to hear that there was nothing in place at the moment and it was therefore important for practice. Officers confirmed that the process and procedure of reviews was retained by children's services, and not by ALS.

The Chair sought for clarification on the post adoption support to adults, with the data showing two hundred and ninety-five adults requesting service in comparison to the ninety people who had received a service and queried whether this was data across all local authorities versus Croydon. Officers confirmed that these numbers had belonged to Croydon, and for clarity that the figures were not separated as it was a report that incorporated all local authorities. It was further said that in December there were 10 adults waiting, though outstanding, it was a significant reduced number. This was partly due to the transfer of a significant numbers of adult to ALS that had not received assistance and additional staff was funded to clear the work. The Chair welcomed the response and requested for future reports to address data relating to Croydon.

Panel Members was interested of the financial spending in adopted adults and queried whether adopted adults had a specific statutory right to services. Officers informed the Panel that there were two categories of service that were provided to adopted adults who were adopted before the year 1975 and adopted after year 1975. The statutory responsibility differs. ALS had provided the same service to everyone, but had now signposted groups and different services which was appropriate to some adults, so there were different tiers of statutory service. ALS was providing six sessions of counselling but this had been reduced to be in line with the funding.

The Panel discussed the ethnicity within the adoption and noted that there was 54% of children from ethnic minority and dual heritage background awaiting placement; also 38% of adopters of ethnic minority and dual heritage; and asked whether there was a matching for children in ethnicity. In matching, officers considered to match children with adopters of the same ethnic background, though there has been matches where a full ethnic background may not be met. Adopters were also used from other agencies and not just from ALS. Recruitment for adopters of ethnic minority remains the focus.

Following this discussion the Chair requested for detailed data on how the 54% and 38% ethnic minority numbers affected children of Croydon, also looking further to the breakdown of the ethnic groups within the percentages; and also reviewing the work around social work with families and early intervention in terms of how children and families were treated, when there was a disproportionate number of black and Asian but predominantly black Caribbean children that are coming into the care system in addition to understanding what was happening with assessments that were taking place when the decision was being made to remove the child permanently for that cohort of children. Officers shared that generally children who had additional

health needs or from a sibling group of different ages were often children who had to wait longer particularly if they were from the ethnic minority groups.

Panel Members requested to learn of more on the total budget of contribution made to understand how much money was put in and its value for money, particularly as Croydon was under financial pressure. Officers shared with the Panel that the service had transferred eight staff members to ALS and the current budget of ALS was approximately £3.6 million pounds and Croydon's contribution this year was around £620,000. There was very little involvement with the Adoption Panel and this was to be reviewed.

Further questions raised by the Panel was asked in regards to the money spent, and Panel Members asked how many of Croydon's children was adopted, how many were of ethnic minority and was there a set target and was the target met? Officers clarified that the funding provided mainly covered the staffing, and at every Board meeting they were provided with the performance that addressed each local authority with information of activity for a quarter and how many children they had in family funding, placed for adoption, how many adopters there was post adoption and was supporting. With this information there was a detailed understanding of the money paid in. There was reconsideration of the budget as Croydon had a higher number of children in adoption and other local authorities had lower numbers. This brought out further questions from the Panel who wanted clarity on whether Croydon was subsidising other local authorities in finding placements for children as they had lower numbers to adopt.

ACTION: For questions relating to the percentages of ethnic minority group in adoption for Croydon and the financial implications to be addressed at the next meeting.

The Chair thanked officers of the report provided which was helpful.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the Adopt London South activity during 2019-2020.

7/21 Croydon Social Care update on children with a plan for adoption

Officers present spoke to the report and provided Members of the Panel an oversight of the permanence options available. They informed that permanence may start at the point from where children became looked after before proceedings and beyond. The service assessed family members, alternative carers within the family network, which took different forms within proceedings, such as Regulation 24, connected person's assessment as well as long term option for a children and the Special Guardianship Order (SGO) which was an alternative placement order.

Officers provided some statistics and highlighted that the number of children looked after fell by 4% last year. This was in line with the children looked after.

The number of looked after children who left care decreased by 4% last year too.

The service conducted assessments and made recommendations to court about whether prospective carers were able to meet the needs of the children and what support they would need. In the last financial year, there was sixty-five SGO granted, three was to foster carers of three children. In the current financial year there was four order in quarter one, six in quarter two and six in quarter three which was a significant decrease, this was believe to be due to a reduction in care proceedings an improved quality of assessments which were more robust. An improvement in the ability to assess kinship carers and progressing through fostering panel – therefore a high number of connected carers, also the delays in proceedings due to the pandemic and court space.

In relation to the financial implications, the service was generous in that the allowance now referred to special guardians and some of the financial review that should have been in place was not, thus now a process for a proper annual review to ensure all special guardians packages that need to be reviewed were reviewed annually. Additional funding had been provided by the government to DfE to commission grandparents plus to offer additional special guardianship support with access to a number of families within the service.

Further to the report, officers summarised that the numbers of children matched with foster carers was better this year than last year. Fostering to adopt was also a significant rise. There was four children with no placement order and twelve children with placement order with active family finding. There was four children making applications to discharge placement orders where the service were looking for families for a long time as a parallel plan. There was three early placements this year. There was fourteen children waiting for adoption who went for a placement order and there was a delay in the court process for this.

In conclusion, work around permanence was improving for the service, which was in line with the vision to achieve a good outcome for children. Though there remain challenges such as timeliness, there was strong indicators of improvement.

Members of the Panel discussed the report and ad contributed to comments and raised questions.

There was comments raised relating to foster carers becoming adopters or special guardians. Though this was desirable there was concern that it was a disincentives for foster carers losing security. Officers informed that discussions were had regularly around foster carers, special guardians and the return to parents. These happen with children so the service could determine the best outcome for the child. It was highlighted that making a decision to care for a children was a difficult decision as there was financial implications.

The Chair noted that the increase in numbers of adopters would hinder the financial support. There was also a disproportionality within the black and Asian community.

Panel Members discussed the agencies.

ACTION: To bring this report back to another Panel Meeting.

Panel Members discussed further on care plans, which officers informed that the Independent Reviewing Officer was the lead for ensuring that care plans were completed.

ACTION: For Panel Members to review the process for Special Guardianship Order or for Children Social Care to provide a flowchart.

The Chair thanked officers for their report.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report and permanence activity during 2020.

8/21 Croydon Renewal Plan and the Impact on Children

Officers present provided a summary of the renewal plan. They shared with the Panel that the renewal plan was still in consultation with proposals made to make significant savings for delivery given that the Council was currently under the S114 Notice.

Officers informed that the service achieved an Ofsted rating of GOOD in 2019 and was still improving.

Officers informed that the pandemic had a significant impact with staffing within the service, children looked after, foster carers and families.

The proposals put forward were to:

- Reduce the early help offer
- Reduce the systemic offer
- Delete the Family Group Conference Service. This service supported children at home and care arrangements for the last year.
- Delete the PAWS service. This national project supported women who had children removed from care.
- Service a reduction in interim and sessional staff.

Panel Members requested for further clarification of the report to provide the Panel with the opportunity to discuss the financial implications. Officers informed that the children services had £15 million in savings over the three years, which needed to be safe to promote the best outcome for the children.

Panel Members sought for clarification on the list of statutory and non-statutory services, and officers informed that there was a duty to provide a statutory service and obligation but not a duty to deliver early help services.

The Chair thanked officers for their report.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the proposals and the likely impact on children and young people.

9/21 How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?

Panel Members welcomed the clear process put in place to support foster carers considering to become special guardians.

Panel Members welcomed the positive discussions on adoption which raised constructions points.

Panel Members appreciated the foster carers input with important issues raised and contributions made, which had helped the children of today.

The Panel acknowledged less red indicators on the children's performance scorecard and that more actions had been met.

Panel Members commented on the disappointment in having to reshape services that families and foster carers put into the care of children.

Panel Members appreciated the work of the staff at the forefront of the struggle faced during this difficult times.

10/21 Work Programme

The Work Programme was received for information.

11/21 Exclusion of the Press and Public

This was not required.

The meeting ended at 7.54 pm

Signed:

Date:

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