

## **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel held on Thursday, 10 December 2020 at 5.00pm.  
This 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, Angela Griffiths

Care Leaver Representative; Ashleigh Searle

Foster Carer Representatives: Angela Christmas, Manny Kwamin (Interim Chair)

Health Commissioners: Pasquale Brammer

#### **Also**

##### **Present:**

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)

Mick McCarthy (Service Manager)

Adam Fearon-Stanley (Service Manager)

Paul Williamson (Strategic Programme Lead)

David Garland (Lead Commissioner)

Thomas Joyce (Young Engagement Worker) Shaun Hanks

Debbie Jones (Director of Children's Social Services)

**Apologies:** Co-optee Members: EMPIRE, Sarah Bailey and Dr Julia Simpson;  
Apologies for lateness from Councillor Shafi Khan.

### **PART A**

#### **51/20 Disclosures of interest**

There were none.

#### **52/20 Urgent Business (if any)**

There was none.

#### **53/20 Update on actions agreed at previous meeting(s)**

There were no actions from the last meeting.

## 54/20 Children in Care Performance Scorecard

Officers spoke to the performance scorecard and in summary highlighted that in care proceedings less children were entering care in comparison to the previous year. Though the number of looked after children was still high with 78/10000 child population comparison to the national average which is 65/10000 child population, the service had been working with children returning safely home with support.

The red indicators on the scorecard highlighted the care planning and participation which was deemed lower and one that required improvement. Since November 2020, there had been changes in staffing and in performance.

Panel Members discussed the scorecard.

*Councillor Shafi Khan arrived at the meeting at 5:27pm*

In response to a question raised by the Panel Co-optee foster carers' representative, regarding the process and expectation of looked after children returning home, officers informed that there was a statutory responsibility to review if any child in care could safely return home. During statutory children looked after reviews for each looked after child, the services involved were present and the child circumstances considered. What was essential was to consider if the parents had made sufficient changes since the child was initially removed to consider safe rehabilitation. The foster carer representative had a follow up question seeking clarification on the involvement of foster carer's advocacy for the looked after children they looked after, as foster carers had not been involved with or understood the process and was often informed of change of circumstance when a child was returning home. Officers responded that social workers had a statutory responsibility to review the care plan and foster carers were part of a child review so they should be aware of plans and their views heard.

The officers talked about circumstances in which parents may request an immediate return home; if accommodation was provided under a section 20 (voluntary sending children into care) and a parent requested for their child to return home, the service cannot prevent the request unless there was an immediate risk.

A section 20 under the Children Act 1989 was a voluntary agreement by the parent. This meant the Local Authority would need to undertake an assessment and provide support after a child returned home if a parent would not agree to a planned return.

The foster care representative further enquired about whether section 20 was a danger to children in care aged 15 years as court proceedings did not often go ahead. Officers responded that Croydon Children's Service had been trying to make positive use of section 20 and ensure works in partnership with families, rather than having orders. It was rare when section 20 did not work as intended.

The Panel Co-optee care leaver representative commented on section 20 and 15 year olds, indicating that consideration needed to be given to young people on section 20 who were returning home, against their wishes but at their parents' request, may suffer. She further informed that it was very important for services to not get complacent on an agreement due to parents or due to a young person's age.

It was noted that there were lower homelessness since the pandemic and national lockdown, and there needed to be a hard offer of early help; though with the change within the Early Help service there was concerns that support was required for young people and the impact on families going forward. Officers responded that there was reductions within the Early Help service and acknowledged that children and families in need was the focus, though children entering care was a lot less due to the pandemic and national lockdown.

Comments were raised by Panel Members that foster carers experiences should be acknowledged as they worked with children every day and also understood the legislation. It was important that foster carers were fully engaged and involved and had their voices heard as it would strengthen the concept of working together. The Chair noted and highlighted to the Panel that the involvement of foster carers was also part of their improvement plan.

Panel Members welcomed the great improvement to the scorecard, though it was recognised that the red indicators was consistent and asked officers how this could turnaround. Officers recognised that the service was not always converting care plans into a pathway plan in a timely manner, and that it was a priority to the service. Currently the service had an 84% completion rate.

The Chair noted that the pathway plan was also a priority to the annual Corporate Parenting Panel.

## **55/20 Children's Social Care Placement Sufficiency**

Officers spoke to the report and in summary, highlighted that the borough had a sufficiency plan around looked after children after accommodation and the plan is from 2019 to 2021.

The service was in process to develop an accommodation strategy that provided sustainable high quality and value for money accommodation provision. It was noted that there was still a number of key decisions to be made in light of the market situation, current commissioning arrangements and practice improvement in addition to the current section 114. Some accommodation placements challenges faced included emergency placements where accommodation was provided on the basis of best available rather than better matching process to meet the needs of the young people; some residential placements have been placed further than twenty miles away, out of the borough and even further away from their birth family.

Officers effectively were promoting Staying Put as the best option for young people, and also to find financial sustainable accommodation options for the council and commission used but would also be appropriate for care leavers and young people when they reached that appropriate age and working along neighbouring services – leaving care, adults services and housing.

Officers shared ongoing work with leaving care, housing and finance to ensure demand for future commissioning and this was in line with the wider supported housing strategy. This work was being led by the Adult Social Care. Tenancy and financial management training both internal offering within the Council, and potential external charities were other options. Work was also being held with the housing team around issues for care leavers in the private rented sector. There was also work with the transition service to support the care leavers who had extra needs or fits into the vulnerable adult's category.

The Panel Co-optee care leaver representative was congratulated by all Members of the Panel and officers for her work in "All About Me" project.

Panel Members commented on the report.

One Panel Member raised a point that the report noted radical change of models alongside the South London Commissioning Programme, and was concerned that there was no acknowledgement of the radical change of delivery to the wider administration Member group, which had financial implications and how it would provide greater opportunity for children. There was a request to learn more and what the risks entailed. The Chair made note that the placement sufficiency report was to be heard at this Panel to address sufficiency around Children's Social Care, for example Staying Put, and thus there were no new models. Officers clarified in response to Member's concern that the radical changes focused on the action in improving quality and sufficiency.

The foster carer representative commented in relation to Staying Put that it would seem that foster carers were often consulted, though this was not the case and that there was a gap between Staying Put and the Shared Lives provision. Officers acknowledged the continued issue that required further attention between Staying Put and Shared Lives. The criteria for a Shared Lives arrangement was more than having a successful Care Act assessment that entitled them to that provision, thus in order for a Shared Lives arrangement to happen, adult services or the transition team needed to first carry out a character assessment to ensure the young person was entitled to services under the Care Act, and if so whether there was duty within that act to provide accommodation Shared Lives should be recommended if appropriate for them. Further, officers informed that there was progression for a revision of the service's Staying Put policy to be compared to other local authorities. The foster care representative requested for clarification following the review of Staying Put in 2018; foster carers were advised that they would no longer be classed as a foster carer at this time. Officers confirmed that this assertion was incorrect and that foster carers would remain on the register if

they had no looked after child within their household, further, foster carers was encouraged no not deregister.

Another Panel Member noted that more needed to be done to achieve goals though this implemented more costs, and wondered whether the service could achieve its required goal with a reduced budget. It was also pointed out that in semi-independent homes, the vast majority was male and queried whether single-sexed accommodation was available, guaranteed, or whether there was simply no choice for females. In response, officers informed that the service was working very hard with children under 18 years old, and unfortunately there was a high number of girls in placements, approximately a 40:60 split. Officers shared that the service used semi-independent support accommodation when there were no other options. There was very little match ability and the service needed to improve in better placed matching. Officers acknowledged the gap in providing support to vulnerable girls and were looking for the best cost efficient service. Further, it was clarified that foster carers were paid by Croydon Council and the housing benefits were paid back. The Chair questioned whether semi-independent homes was available to just Croydon children or extended for cross-borough use, however this was not known by officers. The care leaver representative informed the Panel that was important to also review the pros and cons sustaining single-sexed accommodation which could also be deemed a risk.

Further comments by the care leaver representative informed that young people were not previously involved in strategies and processes, and with the voices of young people heard this shaped Croydon Services, and was thankful for the changes.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to:

- 1.1 To note the progress and current action plan associated with the Council's Sufficiency Plan 2019-2021.

## **56/20 Update on the South London Commissioning Programme**

Officers spoke to the report sharing with the Panel that the South London Commissioning Programme was established in 2013. The role of the programme was to help coordinate special educational need and disability (SEND). In 2017, Croydon became the lead borough to allow a multi-borough framework for independent residency. The Approved Provider Panel Agreement (APPA) framework showed an opportunity to work collaborate. With seven boroughs involved, there had also been cost challenges. Further, officers shared that they were currently in the middle of an evaluation.

The All About Me Project showed key benefits and trends as the hosted borough. This project was created with 250 young people, a profile for young people to have a voice in the referral process. From interests and hobbies and so forth, the young people were aged between 6 and 18 years old. Other local authorities like Sutton and Bexley had also used the All About Me for social work practice. The project had received Ofsted recognition approval from the

department of education. There was other engagement in other areas such as fostering, retention, recruitment, video storytelling, equality and diversity and inclusion.

Panel Members requested for further insight on the budgeting of the organisation on the commission for the South London Commissioning Programme and services meeting particular groups; also further details to cultural and individual heritage. Officers responded highlighting that the All About Me project provided individual heritage and culture. With regards to rates, it was noted that more was asked for less. Officers hoped that the tender providers would pay the tendon living wage, if based in London, as a minimum.

The Chair praised and thanked the team for carrying out such an extraordinary programme and project that had successfully been recognised and valued in other boroughs.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to:

- 1.1 To note the progress of the South London Commissioning Programme and the strategic priorities of the programme for 2021-24.

## **57/20 Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report**

Officers spoke to Independence Review Officer (IRO) Annual report and in summary, highlighted that the service had received feedback from a Ofsted Monitoring visit in October 2019 and a peer review by the improvement partners in Camden whom identified a need to improve the 'Footprint' of the IRO service in challenging and monitoring care planning. To update, the footprint had increased dramatically where the midway reviews had almost doubled from 300 to 700 and case notes that reflected direct contact with children and parents or colleagues outside CLA reviews were normally 600 a month and embedded in a number of different practice forums which offers the opportunities to express children's views and professional views.

Children and parents had been more involved with the service as young children were increasingly being contacted by IROs before and after meetings. Following the pandemic and national lockdown restrictions, the service had to result to using different platforms to communicate with their young person which the service did remarkable quickly and the children continued to have their reviews uninterrupted in the same frequency as before the pandemic.

Participation was recognised as an area that needed to improve.

Panel Members commented on the report.

The Panel Co-optee foster carer representative made a comment addressing that during the pandemic and national lockdown, the older looked after children were happier to use the Microsoft Teams for virtual meetings and

communication with their key workers from home. Foster carers also found that reviews were better run online than in person. Officers recognised the use of virtual meetings and was proud that the logistics moving to fifty meetings a week to facilitate all organisation was proceeding well in comparison to other local authorities.

Panel Members commented on the care plans and the drift and delay, and noted that the IRO had a duty to prevent and challenge conforming drift and delay. Officers responded with regards to the quality of plans that the IRO would prepare reviews to discuss plans, this was known as the mid-year review, and this was highlighted face-to-face. IRO would access decisions, change in placement, stepping down, coming in care, and they attended panel meetings where these measures were discussed and challenged.

Panel Members credited the good report presented to the Panel, which was child centred and commended on the good service. The thorough report was further accredited by the Chair.

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

#### **58/20 How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?**

Comments from the Panel included:

- Work taken with the commissioning around placement and work developed across the borough regarding developing sufficiency at home and wider discussion of children homes, which has been really good.
- Improvement in accommodation.
- Work led by the Care Leavers Representative – the All About Me project, as it got to a place where there was national recognition for good work. Her contribution and work has also given young people a voice.
- Positive progress in the IRO, their real improvement and quality of service.
- The encouragement that care leavers aspire to excel
- Foster carers do not have enough information around section 20 (of the Children's Act 1989) and will need to have greater recognition to the contribution they make to the lives of young people in Croydon.
- The commitment in work and aspiration officers had put in providing good results.
- The Panel challenging officers with questions.
- Welcoming and acknowledging voices from young people, foster carers.

#### **59/20 Work Programme**

The work programme was agreed as per report.

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**60/20 Exclusion of the Press and Public**

This was not required.

The meeting ended at 7.53 pm

**Signed:**

**Date:** .....