

Corporate Parenting Panel

Meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel held on Wednesday, 27 April 2022 at 5.07pm.
This meeting was held remotely.

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Alisa Flemming (Chair);

Councillors Maddie Henson, Bernadette Khan, Mike Bonello, Sue Bennett and Maria Gatland

Co-optee Members

Angela Christmas (Foster Carer Representative), and
Porsha Robinson (EMPIRE)

Also

Present:

Shaun Hanks (Head of Quality Assurance)
Brian Amos (Service Manager)
Anna Bangerter (Interim Manager for Fostering Assessment and Recruitment)
Chloe Gardner (Marketing Officer for Fostering)
Farhana and Mohammed Rafi (Foster Carers)
Paul and Gloria Hutchinson (Foster Carers)
Pearl Earle (Mentor)
Susan Simpson (Mentor)
Lajay Taylor (Youth Engagement Worker – EMPIRE)

Apologies: Co-optee Members: Sarah Bailey, Manny Kwamin
Councillor Pat Clouder

PART A

21/22 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 16 March 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

22/22 Disclosures of interest

There were none.

23/22 Urgent Business (if any)

There was none.

24/22 Update on actions agreed at previous meeting(s)

It was noted that there were a few outstanding actions following the previous meetings, such as, data relating to adopted children and information on care experienced young people, to be completed. The action relating to housing support for the increased uptake in adoption had been completed.

25/22 EMPIRE: Update on activities and engagement

EMPIRE updated the Panel on the activities they have had since the last Panel, which included fun, active and educational activities during Easter.

EMPIRE was also planning Sunday Service, where care leavers had the opportunity to address any arising issues they may have.

EMPIRE attended a Virtual School Head Teacher conference in partnership with Pan London, which provided a great opportunity for care leavers to raise comments to help change the way Virtual Schools delivered support for young people.

EMPIRE current theme was Unity and this was aimed to reunite with siblings and build relationships.

The Chair thanked officers for the work and support given to EMPIRE and welcomed the idea of unity for young people to maintain connections and contact with their siblings.

26/22 Annual Report of the Fostering Service 2021/22

The Corporate Parenting Panel considered the Annual Report of the Fostering Service 2021/22, which provided an overview of the management and outcomes of the service. The Panel received a short presentation overview from the Service Manager, Brian Amos.

In brief, the Panel heard:

Statement of Purpose:

The Statement of Purpose document was prescribed by Fostering Services Regulations since 2011 and it had set out the Fostering Agency Services' aims and objectives, services, and facilities that it would provide.

Foster carer recruitment:

In relation to the foster carer recruitment, the Interim Manager for Fostering Assessment and Recruitment, Anna Bangerter, and Marketing Officer for Fostering, Chloe Gardner, shared that the service was brought back in-house, providing a very good performance given the difficult time for fostering recruitment. 80% of the budget was moved to online due to the covid-19

pandemic, and included Facebook advertising, geographical targeted online articles, Google display network, banner advertising to name a few.

The new experienced team continued to target marketing areas and intelligent prospecting, which included remarketing, search marketing and contextual remarketing targeting online interests.

Experienced assessment process – Feedback from Newly Foster Carers

The Panel heard feedback from guest speakers who were newly approved foster carers, in relation to their experience of the assessment and panel process being approved.

Guest speakers Mohammed and Farhana shared that they had started their process before the covid-19 pandemic, which delayed their assessment. They persevered and completed their assessment in 2021. They found the process and procedure complicated and thorough and had helpful staff to help with the process. The newly foster carers were happy with Croydon.

Guest speakers Paul and Gloria were recently approved in February and had a good experience during the application process, which was thorough, long, and extensive, though it had opened conversations and they had seen the end reward. The experience had helped them to open as an individual, and they found the service very helpful and supportive. The foster carers appreciated their role in preparation to support young person.

Key elements of mentoring and work and services within Foster Care

In relation to the mentoring service support, Mentors Pearl Earle and Susan Simpson, informed the Panel that the purpose of mentoring was to provide support to newly approved foster carers and also provide support during their journey. Mentees would be met once a week during the first three months and fortnightly during the latter three months of a six-month period where comments would be feedback to recruitment or training team and providing space for mentoring. Enhanced mentoring was also provided to connected carers who would enter the fostering service via a different route, this helped facilitate a change in the mindset of expectations versus reality and supported specific needs with the provision of peer support. Mentoring also pushed for the mentees to take part in other organisations and training. Mentees benefited from loyal and experienced carers by being part of the mentoring programme.

Panel Members welcomed the presentation which provided a good insight to the mentoring service and the fostering recruitment. It was also refreshing to hear of the challenging experiences in the voices of foster carers which had helped understand processes. Further, the progress of the project of the Muslim community developing was also welcomed.

In response to queries raised by the Panel, the Interim Manager for Fostering Assessment and Recruitment and the Marketing Officer for Fostering clarified the following:

- In relation to further projects and whether there was progress of recruiting foster carers within other parts of the community, officers responded that there was a staff member within the team who was delegated to do community work and had visited schools, faith groups and community groups to build relationships, where in return strong candidates were put forward.

At 5:50pm, Councillor Maddie Henson left the meeting.

- In relation to the question around the voices of care experienced young people taken into consideration within the recruitment of foster carers to ensure the right foster carers were sought, officers informed that they use the feedback from the annual review from care experienced children which were incorporated into the three-day skills-to-fostering course being delivered. The specification was warranted as the care experienced young people's experience would help provide the qualities in what would make a good foster carer with the feedback used for the recruitment process. EMPIRE highlighted that they had done a lot of work around this and would liaise with officers, further highlighted that they had previously involvement in the skills-to-fostering training and requested for care experienced young people to have a role as paid staff on the panel, which was welcomed.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to:

1. Note the evaluation of the Fostering Service as set out in the Annual Report including the CFCA's report;
2. Approve the Statement of Purpose 22/23; and
3. Endorse the key priorities for development in 22/23 as set out in this report.

The Chair thanked the officers their report and the guest speakers for their comments and shared experience. Further comments from Panel Members thanked the Service Manager for the improvements in the fostering service which had made a very huge difference today.

At 6:30pm Councillor Mike Bonello left the meeting.

27/22 Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2021-2022

The Corporate Parenting Panel considered the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2021-2022, which provided an overview of the work presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel in 2021-2022 and is a celebration of the success, achievements and areas of improvement of Croydon's Children Looked After and Care Leavers. The Panel received a short presentation overview from the Head of Quality Assurance, Shaun Hanks.

In brief summary, the Panel heard that:

- Overall, in 2021-2022 year was marked by the covid-19 pandemic, restructure within the service which integrated unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
- There was a changed in the demographics which saw a reduction in looked after children, an increase in Black and Black British children and mixed ethnicity.
- 84% of children were in fostering, where 50% of the foster carers used were from Croydon.
- In terms of risk, there was 17% of young people who go missing from care and 56% of return to home interviews undertaken which needed more improvement.
- The Health Operational Group had focused on the quality of the health assessments and the timeliness of the assessments, which needed more focus.
- Two thirds of the care experienced young people were unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
- There were 75% of 17-18 years olds, and 59% of 19-21 year olds engaged in Education Employment and Training, which was slightly higher than statistical neighbours. More work was channelled around this.
- There were fourteen children adopted.
- EMPIRE had provided outstanding service in support provided to young people and the engagement from young people.
- There was a strong independent visiting and advocacy service provided to the young people, and there were work to expand services to 18-25 year olds who equally required support.
- The priorities for 2022-2023 included reviewing the experience of care and identifying differences; reviewing the support that works for care experienced 16-18 year olds; missing children; the systemic understanding of relationships and trauma informed practice; and to increase 'local' homes in fostering which would be sufficient and close to Croydon.

Panel Members thanked the officers for the annual report which was seen as a huge improvement. The priorities going forward was welcomed.

In response to queries raised by the Panel, the Head of Quality Assurance clarified the following:

- In relation to whether there was policy in place to support care leavers up until aged 25, officers confirmed that since 2018 the legislation requested for support to be given to young people up until age 25 if this was what they required. The service was putting in better services to help the leaving care experienced young people with additional support.
- In relation to the trauma and adolescence review that was conducted, officers informed that the work had been conducted through the children's safeguarding partnership and across the agencies. Though there was an increase in crime, and there was a better understanding in trauma following the high risk assessments and multiagency approach which had taken place.
- In relation to the comment around work done to increase the number of foster carers for larger sibling groups, officers informed that within the fostering recruitment this was a focus area, additionally, a lot of the sibling groups accommodated often came from court, and the work with the legal teams and support would help review trends, ethnicity and matching. The Chair welcomed the work around this.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to approve the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report of 2021-2022 to be taken to Full Council in July.

In any other business, a Panel Member addressed her concern for unaccompanied asylum seeking children in the two-tier system particularly relating to the emotional wellbeing not considered [in a particular case]. It was highlighted and addressed by the Chair that children who were vulnerable and experienced trauma had received the support required, as Croydon was a borough that welcomed all children. Further, officers responded and acknowledged where there were failures and have liaised with services to ensure the system was better for unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

28/22 Children in Care Performance Scorecard

The Corporate Parenting Panel considered the Children in Care Performance Scorecard which provided an overview of the March month. The Panel received an overview from the Head of Quality Assurance, Shaun Hanks, who highlighted the following:

- There was an overall decrease in the number of children looked after, though there was a slight uplift in March – with 16 USAC that came.
- Visits within timescales – had a better performance with 6 weekly visits, though the 4 weekly needed improvement.
- Up-to-date reviews saw a completion of 92% of the targeted 95%.

- There was a disappointment in the figures where young people aged 16-18 with a care plan (77%) and also eligible for a pathway plan (71%). The numbers had dipped down due to staffing.
- There were a number of green performances which was good.
- The percentage of foster carers' most recent announced visit within timescales had also decreased with a 82% of the targeted 95%, which was also due to staffing.
- The percentage of 17-21 year olds and 19-21 year olds now in employment, education or training had both increased by 1% which was better than the scorecard provided in February though this still required improvement. The numbers was however statistically better than the neighbouring boroughs.

Panel Members welcomed the performance scorecard which had shown several green performances that was good and improved, though there were great concerns with the continuous red indicators.

Officers responded that there was often a gradual improvement with the red performances before the percentage would fall, and the service was continuously working hard to monitor the staffing and caseloads to maintain improvement.

29/22 How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?

It was helpful to hear from the mentoring team, also, directly from the new foster carers relating to the fostering, challenges and process of the thorough scrutiny which had brought reassurance in providing great carers.

The fostering service report highlighted good work and improvement. It was also highlighted that the work of the Croydon Foster Carers Association with the fostering service received positive outcomes making everything a better offer for the young people.

30/22 Work Programme

The work programme in the agenda had shown what the Panel had seen this 2021-2022 municipal year. The work programme was to be reviewed for the new municipal year.

31/22 Exclusion of the Press and Public

This was not required.

The meeting ended at 7.18 pm

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Date:

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