

Corporate Parenting Panel

Meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel held on Wednesday, 21 June 2023 at 5.02pm in F10, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Maria Gatland (Chair);

Councillors Mike Bonello, Amy Foster, Joseph Lee, Helen Redfern and Catherine Wilson

Co-optee Members

Angela Christmas (Foster Carer Representative)

Manny Kwamin (Foster Carer Representative)

Shelley Davies (Director of Education)

Sarah Bailey (Head of Virtual School & Head of Service for Access to Education)

Julia Simpson (Children Looked After Designated Doctor)

Charity Kanotangudza (Children Looked After Designated Nurse)

Also

Present:

Roisin Madden, Director of Children's Social Care

Carolyn Jones, Interim Head in Service Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People

Adam Fearon-Stanley, Service Manager

Jane Scott, Subject Expert

Mellissa Lewars, Project and Improvement Manager

Apologies:

Councillors Ian Parker, Tamar Barrett; Briege Gilhooly (Interim Head of Specialist Service for Children and Young People)

Councillors Mike Bonello and Catherine Wilson for lateness

PART A

30/23 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 26 April 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

31/23 Disclosures of interest

There were none.

32/23 Urgent Business (if any)

There was none.

33/23 Update on actions agreed at previous meeting(s)

The request of the update following the Doncaster Case was considered in the [National Safeguarding Practice Review Croydon Working Group] report the Panel received which was heard later in the meeting.

34/23 Update from Children in Care Council EMPIRE

The Service Manager, Adam Fearon-Stanley shared with the Panel that a lot of activities with the Children in Care Council had been connected to the refresh of staffing and activities related to developing the strategy.

There was support for the Fostering Hub, Corporate Parenting Panel Co-Chair, having members as part of the subgroups and Virtual college which were the current focus.

The service had been finalising an activity provision for the summer for children to plan their summer activities.

The ongoing podcast sessions continued to hear the voices of children.

The survey of children was a part of the audit activity where fourteen young people responded this was a snapshot in time of their care experience.

The Chair acknowledged the amount of work EMPIRE were going through with a staff shortage.

35/23 National Safeguarding Practice Review Croydon Working Group Update

The Corporate Parenting Panel considered the National Safeguarding Practice Review Croydon Working Group report which provided an update from the working group established in Croydon to implement the recommendations of the National Safeguarding Practice Review in safeguarding children with disabilities and complex needs in residential settings.

The Chair shared with the Panel that following the Doncaster case the Government issued recommendations to all Councils. Following a presentation on Croydon Council's response at a previous Panel meeting the Chair requested a follow up report to address some gaps identified by the Panel.

The Service Manager, Adam Fearon-Stanley, highlighted that the service had made progress following the recommendations from the government. The service was working closely with the Children with Disabilities Team, commissioning team around staffing and monitoring this, additionally setting out clear dates for when this would be progressed.

The Chair had requested for a follow-up update report for the delivery of the recommendations.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the contents and next steps set out in the report.

36/23 Presentation on the development of Fostering Support

The Corporate Parenting Panel received a presentation on the development of Fostering Support.

The Chair shared with the Panel that there was a transformation project undergoing within the Children's Department which included the Fostering service and an advertisement for more foster carers in the borough and further noted that there was a high proportion of in-house foster carers which was positive, though more was required.

The Panel received a presentation from the Subject Expert, Jane Scott, and highlighted the importance of foster carers, support, recruitment, and retention of the foster carers continued to be challenging.

The Panel heard that:

Nationally:

- Recruitment continued to be challenging.
- Overall the number of homes available for children had reduced.
- There was an increasing number of connected kinship carers who were family members known to the children and formally became foster carers for a period of time until a decision would be made for a final outcome of the care of the child.
- Applications to foster had decreased.
- The Independent Fostering Agency (IFAs) had increased over the years and supplements the pool of homes for Children Looked After and made up for 45% of placements nationally.

In Croydon:

- The request for information and enquiries were up from 41% in 2021/22. As part of the transformation process the service had been looking at different approaches to improve the first point of contact. The service had looked at responses to enquires, follow up to the enquires

and information sharing to ensure its availability and partnership with other agencies.

- The children looked after in Croydon in-house, were 255 compared to the IFA which held 194 of Croydon children looked after.
- Spending: In-house foster placement costs were on average £722 per week per child and an IFA cost on average £995 per week per child.
- The retention of carers was a challenge as a considerable number had ceased due to retirement,
- The total contacts from 2021-2022 were up from 330 to 471 in the last year which averaged 55 contacts per month.
- The service had developed a fast-track assessment process for those carers transferring in from other agencies which was attractive.
- The assessment length had been reduced due to training delivery improvements.
- The recruitment and retention plan had shown attractive incentives from IFA transfers and referring a friend.
- There had been digital work development to address marketing, fostering web pages and enquiries.
- Further support for foster carers included mentor and buddy system; membership to "Foster Talk"; and fostering hubs (which supported improvements in practice, such as training and clinical, emotional, crisis and stability support).

In response to the question relating to the length of time it took to match a foster carer with a child and how timely the panel approvals, the Panel heard that the point of when a child was placed and matched was varied. When carers were approved there would be a child aligned to them through the approval process and matching could happen within a week, though for other carers there may be circumstantial factors to consider which could delay the matching process.

In response to the question relating to retention with families stopping (not retiring) after a few years, and the move of IFAs to in-house, the Panel heard that communication was the best way in making a difference. There were clear lines for recruitment for the Croydon offer. The service would review factors of an individual carer and what was best placed for the young person, and the offer Croydon was providing was making a difference. There were situations where after approval that there was a swift and a timely response to carers with a diversity of ways to support foster carers to stay in Croydon, though this was not always possible.

In response to the question relating to recruiting carers where English was not their first language, the Panel heard that part of the specialist recruitment role was to go to communities engaging with people from the communities that children needing care came from, assistance was provided with language challenges, this included faith institutions, and was the main area of focus.

In response to the question relating to the proportion of looked after children with disabilities in foster care, those in-house and specific steps to improve foster carers taking on caring for children with disabilities, the Panel heard

that there was more room for improvement regarding carers for children with disabilities, and as part of the development the service had adapted training to provide more information with a broad spectrum with children they may be matched with. There was also specific training in specialised areas of disabilities, and there was specific recruitment for pathways for foster carers in this area.

The Chair welcomed the presentation and transformation project the fostering service were developing looked forward to a future update.

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

37/23 Corporate Parenting Strategy Report

The Corporate Parenting Panel considered the Corporate Parenting Strategy Report which incorporated the feedback from the previous Corporate Parenting Board consultation on the draft Corporate Parenting Strategy.

The Chair shared that following the last Corporate Parenting Panel meeting there were a few amendments with the strategy and noted the transition the Panel was aiming towards.

The Subject Expert, Jane Scott, shared with the Panel that following the feedback from the previous meeting each priority area had been adapted according to the feedback.

In relation to “measures and how it would apply” within the strategy report, the purpose of the sub-groups was for this work to be delivered. The measures related to indicators and was for the sub-group leads to determine how to evidence the impact of their work.

The Chair shared with the Panel on the new transitional period the service and Corporate Parenting Panel were in and highlighted that much of the work would be done through the subgroups.

The Panel discussed the delivery timeline for the subgroups to manage control which was in a working progress. The Panel welcomed the notion of sub-groups.

The Panel further discussed the support that was provided to children to access higher education, and the expectation was that the service would have a pathway that was appropriate to enable the young person to achieve their potential, be it higher education or employment or in training.

The Panel heard that following the conclusions of this report the governance process would be addressed with the Corporate Management Team with the aim to be heard at Cabinet before the end of this year.

The Chair welcomed the report and was looking forward to the new strategy of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to agree the final version of the Corporate Parenting Strategy 23-25.

38/23 Children in Care & Care Experienced Adults Scorecard

The Corporate Parenting Panel considered the Children in Care and Care Experienced Adult Scorecard.

The Director of Children Services, Roisin Madden introduced the scorecard and highlighted that:

- Nationally, Croydon's NEET levels were good.
- The service was doing well in suitable accommodation and keeping in touch measures.
- Care plans and pathway plans continued to be an issue.

The Interim Head in Service Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People, Carolyn Jones, shared with the Panel the clear evidence of concerns raised with the care plans and pathway plans completion in time. At 77% of pathway plans that were recorded in time scales for carer experienced young people, this was highlighted not good enough with the service target of 85%. In May, 177 pathway plans for children eligible for a plan between 16 and 25 years of age were not recorded in time scales, which could have meant their personal advisor or social worker had started the engagement work and had not completed the paperwork. The restructure in the service had seen an impact in the capacity of work for social workers to spend more time with their young people, for better quality of work. During the service's deep dive to address the issue, the service had established that ten practitioners had many pathway plans out of date which was due to long term sick leave impacting other pressures on capacity, and other significant issues. There were to be more service meetings to address the impact of these issues, though the Panel was assured that the quality of the pathway plans was of good standard following audit activity.

The Panel discussed the challenges that could arise with the low performance in pathway plans and though the service were doing well with keeping in touch with the young person the service was not lacked recording and capturing information received into a plan in a timely way. The Panel further discussed the lessons learned, which further looked at the culture shift and training. Following a challenge from the Panel on when the Panel would see a sustainable improvement in the quality and timeliness of Pathway Plans, the Panel was informed that it would take six months for sustainable improvement.

The Chair welcomed the clear explanation for the concerns the Panel had raised relating to care plans and pathway plans and welcomed the developing work in this and look forward to the delivery in six months as proposed.

Panel members welcomed the new style of the performance report however requested more detail and considered that further iterations were needed. The Director of Children’s Social Care agreed to ask the Performance Team to contact members directly to hear their feedback to enable the performance information report to grow in relevance to the needs of the panel.

39/23 Exclusion of the Press and Public

This was not required.

The meeting ended at 6.32 pm

Signed:

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Date:

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