

Corporate Parenting Panel

Meeting of held on Wednesday, 20 March 2024 at 5.00 pm in Room 1.01 and 1.02 -
Bernard Weatherill House, Mint Walk, Croydon CR0 1EA

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Maria Gatland (Chair); Councillors Amy Foster, Ian Parker, Helen Redfern and Catherine Wilson

Co-optee Members

KH (Care Experienced Young Person Co-Chair)
Angela Christmas (Foster Carer Representative)
Joel Pace-Jr (Youth Service Co-Ordinator)
Shelley Prince (Head of Commissioning & Procurement CYPE)
Simon Robson (Director of Adult Social Care Operations (Deputy DASS))
Shelley Davies (Director of Education)
Sarah Bailey (Head of Access to Education Service)
Manny Kwamin (Foster Carer Representative)
Adam Fearon-Stanley (Service Manager)

Also

Present: Carolyn Jones (Interim Head of Service Children in Care & Care Experienced Young People)
Jane Scott (Subject Matter Expert)
Deborra John (Head of Service Children in Care & Care Experienced Young People)
Alison Welch (Leaving Care (NEET) Officer)
Amma Ahwireng (Advisory Teacher for CLA Outcomes)
Marcia Smith (Advisory Teacher for CLA Outcomes)
Ben Ensom (Head of Safeguarding and Wellbeing, Croydon College)
Tashala Lawson (Youth Engagement Practitioner)
Dan Bowden (Head Teacher, Greenvale Primary School)
Louise Wilkinson (Co-Director, The ARC Centre)

Apologies: Róisín Madden (Director of Children's Social Care) and Councillors Barrett and Lee

PART A

9/24 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

10/24 Disclosures of interest

There were none.

11/24 Urgent Business (if any)

There was none.

12/24 Update on actions agreed at previous meeting(s)

Performance Report:

The Panel heard that practitioners in Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People teams would be updating their emails to contain their line manager and duty contact details. A standard out of office script had also been implemented for use by staff who were on leave for longer than a day containing the same information. In cases where a practitioner was out of office for more than one week, the Team Manager would be responsible for contacting each child on the practitioners' caseload to inform them of the arrangements in their absence.

The Panel asked for an update on how the duty system was working and were informed that the new arrangements already discussed gave clear direction and that there was an expectation that conversations would also be taking place with young people and families during normal contact. The Panel highlighted the importance of not asking young people to wait for their social worker or personal assistant to return from leave to deal with their queries.

ACTION – For the Panel to receive a further update on improvements to the duty system at the next meeting.

13/24 Update on Protected Characteristic Working Group

The Corporate Parenting Panel received a verbal update from the Youth Service Co-Ordinator on the Protected Characteristic Working Group. The first young person's group had met with the next session scheduled for March 2024; the following feedback was given:

- Opt-in is an important option for young people and young people valued being able to make this choice for themselves.
- Young people had concerns about resentment from others.
- Young people had concerns about carrying additional labels.
- Young people had questions about why this was important at this time in their lives.

The following questions were asked by young people at the session:

- What plans did the Council have around protected characteristics?
- Could this have a negative impact later in life?
- Why is this important for young people right now?

The Panel heard that the next meeting of the group would include young people up to the age of 25. The Chair commented that young people needed more information around protected characteristics and asked the Subject Matter Expert to look into this. The Chair encouraged officers to talk to other Councils who had done similar work to see if there were any lessons learned that could be adopted for future group meetings.

The Head of Safeguarding and Wellbeing for Croydon College offered to collaborate with officers to promote future meetings of the group to young people.

The service manager for the participation service is working closely with HR and the Communications team to share a survey to 18+ Care Experienced Adults within the council and in the wider community. The feedback from the initial consultations will inform the survey approach. The Panel discussed the importance of providing young people with the correct information in surveys to ensure that responses were accurate and representative.

The Panel were informed that the contract for the Care Leavers app is with the legal team to progress and the Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) for the Care Leavers app had now been completed and signed off.

14/24 Update from Children's Participation Team & Children in Care Council

The Corporate Parenting Panel received an update from the Children's Participation Team. The Youth Service Co-Ordinator shared with the Panel that there were 14 active ambassadors who would soon receive their first payment for their work, and that recruitment for ambassadors was still ongoing.

The Panel heard that there was ambassador representation on all Corporate Parenting Panel Sub-Groups and that ambassadors had given feedback on new Pathway Plans. Ambassadors had presented to Heads of Service meetings and the Staff Conference Panel. The Panel were informed that a pilot 'participatory recording portal project' had been started to allow ambassadors to record their own journeys; this would allow young people to write directly into their own file, which would trigger a notification to their social worker.

Ambassadors had attended the Pan London Forum and the Panel heard that the main takeaways had been that there needed to be a focus on improving consistency of social care services between boroughs, improving representation, and working to reduce young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) levels for care experienced young people. The Forum had also discussed transport and mental health services for young

people, with it noted that mental health had suffered amongst young people during the pandemic. The Chair commented that the Forum had been a very positive event. The Panel learned that Transport for London (TfL) would be launching a care experienced young person's discount of 50% for trams and buses for under 25s.

The relaunch of the Care Experienced Forum would take place in April 2024 with it hoped that this would engage new young people to participate. The Panel were informed that there would be sessions focussed around the Corporate Parenting Strategy priorities and consideration given on how to engage children of all ages, for example by use of 'AdvoCat', an engagement programme for primary age children.

The Chair praised the work being done by the ambassadors and the Children's Participation Team. The Panel heard that a recent conference had shown that care experienced young people were subject to greater health inequalities, and that there would be future engagement with colleagues in the South West London Integrated Care Board (SWLICB) and NHS England around these issues.

15/24 Education, Employment & Training Sub-Group discussion

The Corporate Parenting Panel received a verbal update on the Education, Employment & Training Sub-Group discussion which had taken place in the previous week.

The Director of Education introduced the item and explained that the meeting had included three ambassadors, with a follow up meeting planned. The group had discussed what was currently working well and what needed improvement around education, employment and training for care experienced young people. The three key themes that had emerged were:

- Decision Making
- Transitions
- Communication

The Sub-Group would develop an action plan following the discussions that had taken place in the meeting as well as further develop how success would be measured. The Co-Chair fed back that they had found the meeting to be positive and that they were looking forward to seeing the action plan develop.

The Panel were informed that a lot of work had been taking place around the virtual school and a transition event had taken place in September 2023 to discuss the support needs of children and ensure the correct information was available to them. There had also been conversations about support that could be provided during the summer for young people transitioning between schools and colleges. The Panel heard that there were considerations around adding a 'transitions' page to the care leaver app. The importance of protecting the support network around young people was highlighted as well

as the need to provide the pathways that young people needed to follow their ambitions and achieve their goals.

The Chair asked for an update on the Care Leaver app, and the Panel heard that the contract was awaiting legal sign off but that the DPIA had been now been completed; a definitive date for the contract to be finalised was not yet available. The Panel were informed that background work was still ongoing and that a team of young people were ready to help co-design aspects of the app.

The Head of Safeguarding and Wellbeing for Croydon College explained that the SWLICB had provided a career day for young people and adults, and suggested that future events could be promoted to care experienced young people. The Panel heard about the Black Care Experience Conference which had taken place in February 2024.

16/24 Annual Report of the Virtual School

The Panel received an introduction from the Co-Director of 'The Arc Centre' and the Head Teacher of Greenvale Primary School and heard about the work being done with young people receiving emotional wellbeing support through animal care and mentoring and the positive effects this was having on their lives and life chances. The Panel praised the work being done and reflected that this had opened up additional opportunities to engage with young people later on in their lives.

The Panel received the Annual Report of the Virtual School which was introduced by the Head of Access to Education Service who ran through a presentation summarising the report. In response to a question on NEETs from Councillor Parker, the Panel heard that there was ongoing work with Head of Employment, Skills & Economic Development and the Education, Employment & Training Sub-Group to look at how NEET rates could be reduced; it was hoped that the impact of this work would be apparent in next year's Annual Report. The Panel received testimony from the Advisory Teacher for CLA Outcomes about a student who had successfully engaged with the Virtual School to improve their education outcomes and attendance.

The Leaving Care (NEET) Officer informed the Panel about work done with a young person through the NEET Drop-In Sessions at the Turnaround Centre who had received help with how to fill in job applications. The young person had been able to engage with the 'Smart Works' charity to undertake some coaching sessions and had been provided with an interview outfit; this had led to the young person successfully applying to a job through a social work open day at a different council.

The Panel commented on the importance of lasting relationships with professionals developed through the virtual school or college. The Panel heard about the launch of the Inclusion Strategy that would be taking place in the next year. In response to questions about whom the Virtual School was

open to, it was clarified that this was any young person who had an allocated social worker in the last six years.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to:

1. Agree the report and the key priorities for the Access to Education Service, which form the foundation for the day-to-day operation of the Virtual School.
2. Act in governance of the Virtual School operations, 2022-23 Access to Education service priorities were:
 1. Ensure Croydon's schools take steps to become more inclusive: working in partnership with the Local Authority CYPE Directorate, including Children's Social Care, on issues around race, equalities, and safeguarding.
 2. Ensure all vulnerable pupils and young people are supported in their education, training, and employment settings to make progress towards better educational outcomes.
 3. Ensure training, advice and guidance is available to all Croydon settings for the inclusion of the most vulnerable.

17/24 Performance Report

The Corporate Parenting Panel received the Performance report for the January data. The Interim Head in Service Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People introduced the item.

The Chair asked for an update on how young people could know who to contact during holidays and when social workers were on leave. The Panel heard that an agreed email signature and out of office had been adopted for all social workers and personal assistants. The Panel were informed that there needed to be better forward planning for services to move to a less reactive approach.

The Panels attention was drawn to indicators AD0 to AD9 and it was explained that these indicators referred to adoptions. The Panel heard that this area was performing well and that a new team had been formed to strategically focus on adoptions; this was partly responsible for this increased performance.

ACTION – For the Performance Report to continue to include adoption indicators AD0 to AD9 for future meetings.

On CLA 15, it was explained that issues around Pathway Plans were being worked on, but that this would take some time due to complexity and legacy issues. The Panel heard that the Council was engaged in improvement work with Islington Council who had raised that the Pathway Plan tool used in Croydon could be improved and a better format used; Islington Council had

consulted with Croydon staff and young people on a new format. The Panel asked when it was expected that improvement would be apparent and heard that the average improvement journey was around two years, owing to the number of Children Looked After and Care Experienced Young People in Croydon. The Panel were informed that there needed to be a culture shift for team managers to be able to decline to sign off Pathway Plans and have the confidence to miss timescales when these were not good enough. The Panel heard that the service was under additional scrutiny with the Chief Executive sitting in on some performance meetings.

ACTION – For an update on Pathway Plans to be given at future meetings of the Panel.

The meeting ended at 6.59 p.m.

Signed:

Date:

.....
.....