

REPORT TO:	Corporate Parenting Panel 5th September 2019
SUBJECT:	The Independent Visitor Service and Learning Mentor Volunteer Scheme
LEAD OFFICER:	Nick Pendry Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr Alisa Flemming Cabinet Member - Children, Young People & Learners
WARDS:	All
CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT/AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON:	
FINANCIAL IMPACT None.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

None.

2. Independent Visitor Service and Learning Mentor Volunteer Scheme

- 2.1 Croydon Children's Services are expanding the one to one work they do with children using volunteers.
- 2.2 The Learner Mentor service is a new scheme seeking prospective mentors from within the Council to work with 25 young people aged 14 to 16 who are learning in mainstream schools.
- 2.3 The Learning mentoring scheme in Virtual school was set up for two key reasons. One, at the direct request of a number of CLA young people in academic year 9 (through the Children in Care Council and our visits to schools) who told us they felt they needed non-school based support and someone independent but with relevant skills, to take an interest in and assist with their studies and career progression.
- 2.4 It was also identified through PEPS, that there were a small but clearly identifiable group of Y10 and Y11 students who were felt to be slightly coasting and when discussing with these students what may support them, a carefully designed academic mentoring programme was felt to be the best solution.
- 2.5 The ambition of the scheme is for volunteers to use their own experiences of education to guide a young person through the challenges of studying and

- preparing for exams. Exploring interests and future life choices are also a key part of the mentor/mentee relationship.
- 2.6 Mentors will be expected to commit for six months, offering an hour of their time per week to meet with their assigned young person.
- 2.7 The mentoring services have begun their recruitment of volunteers and plan to start working with young people as the new term starts in September. The scheme is run by Kathryn Kashyap in the Virtual School team.
- 2.8 The Independent Visitor Service has a legal definition and function defined by the Children Act 1989 and subsequent amendments. It forms part of the child and young person's care plan and is often recommended by the Independent Reviewing Officer as a key part of the support package for Looked After Children and Young People. The Independent Visitor can support the young person to share and be heard in receiving the full care and support they are entitled to. The nature of the relationship means that Young People often trust their Independent Visitor with concerns and needs that they may not share with professionals and Carers. The Independent nature of the role, and the fact it is being done without payment, is important for our young people who often feel surrounded by people who are being paid to care for them.
- 2.9 The Independent Visitor service in the council has been operating within the Quality Assurance service of Children's Social Care for over ten years. There are currently three dedicated Independent Visitor Co-ordinators who train and support over 80 volunteers at present and we plan to increase the number of volunteers to over 100 by the end of October.
- 2.10 Independent Visitors support the social and emotional development of children and young people through building a long term supportive relationship which allows them to develop trust in a caring adult.
- 2.11 Due to the nature of the Independent Visitor relationship it can be used in many different ways depending on the child or young person's needs and interests. It also changes over the lifetime of the relationship as the young person grows and their needs change.
- Currently 80 young people are matched with a volunteer – this is approximately 10% of Looked After Children in Croydon. The national average is 3.2%.
 - The team has expanded to grow the service and reach even more young people.
 - 12.5% of matches are over 4 years old and 60% of matches
 - 30% are over 2 years old and a further 25% are over a year old.
- 2.12 The following case studies demonstrate some of these aspects of the Independent Visitor Relationship.

Long term

- 2.13 A key part of what we try and achieve with Independent Visitors is longevity and stability. Looked after children go through the disruption and distress of coming into care and sometimes then have a succession of carers, social workers and

other professionals in their life. Having an adult who is there throughout and sees them grow, achieve and change, supporting them irrespective of their challenges, is key to the role and its impact.

- 2.14 One of our matches began when the young person was 8, and they are now 15 and still see each other regularly. The Independent Visitor has been there through a great deal of change; moving to secondary school, placement changes, multiple changes of social worker, moves out of Croydon, being reintroduced to family. They now meet, going for a meal and a catch up, and the young person is able to share his achievements and ups and downs with someone who has been there to see his whole story in care.

Placement changes

- 2.15 One of our young people who has a match which began in 2014 has left five placements in that time due to escalations in his behaviour and mental health needs. He is currently placed in West London after two specialist residential placements broke down. His Independent Visitor has stuck with him throughout from the age of 10 until he was 16. Despite being rejected a number of times as the young person went through periods of rejecting all support the relationship is still valued. Recently after another 'bump in the road', I checked in to set up a meeting and got this response from his carer - "spoke to J about this this evening and he stated that he is keen to have contact with [the Independent Visitor], as he has known him longer than pretty much all the other professionals in his life."

Modelling behaviour – cultural and gender connection

- 2.16 DM was matched to R as he had recently come into care at the age of 9 having been through a great deal of trauma pre-separation. His carer had done great work with him and his brothers, but the IRO and Social Worker felt he needed a male from his cultural background who could model positive behaviour and help him re-establish trust with adult males.
- 2.17 We identified a cultural match, and a person who could manage his behaviours without cutting him off from fun and positivity. They immediately hit it off, getting out locally, playing football in the park, keeping a 'savings pot' so they can save towards a big day out at Thorpe Park, talking about school, home, feelings, and hopes. Even when R has had a difficult week at school his IV is still there for him to give him space and time to offload. Here's a quote from the IV - "On the way back home I asked R what his favourite part of the day had been, and he said he liked it all, but the main thing was that we'd had fun together."

Speaking out via the Independent Visitor

- 2.18 L recently went out with her Independent Visitor and told her that she was very unhappy in her placement and felt concerned that she couldn't talk to anyone else about the issues she was having. The Independent Visitor spoke to the Independent Visitor co-ordinator who then talked to the social worker and IRO who are now aware of the issues and can begin to deal with the concerns. L

still trusts her Independent Visitor and understands that people can help her if she tells them what she is thinking and experiencing.

3. CONSULTATION

N/A

4. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

N/A

5. COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL SOLICITOR AND MONITORING OFFICER

N/A

6. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

N/A

7. EQUALITIES IMPACT

N/A

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

N/A

9. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

N/A

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