

Corporate Parenting Panel

Meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel held on Thursday, 5 September 2019 at 5.02 pm in F10, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Alisa Flemming (Chair);

Councillors Shafi Khan, Janet Campbell, Bernadette Khan, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Maria Gatland and Helen Redfern

Co-optee Members:

Foster Carer Representatives: Angela Christmas and Martin William (Chair of Foster Carers Association);

Care Leaver Representative; Ashleigh Searle;

EMPIRE: Young People and Council Staff;

Virtual School: Shelley Davies and Sarah Bailey

Also

Present: Nick Pendry (Director of Early Help and Children's social Care)
Vanessa Strang (Head of Social Work with Children Looked After and Care Leavers)
Karen Massey (Quality Assurance Manager)
Fiona MacKirdy (Service Manager Leaving Care)
Derek Dyer (Looked After Children Service Manager)
Boris Rupnik (Youth Engagement Coordinator - Voice)
Dianne Smith (Executive Support Officer)

Apologies: Apologies for lateness received from Councillors Alisa Flemming and Jerry Fitzpatrick and Bernadette Khan; apologies for absence received from Co-optee Member Manny Kwamin

PART A

Councillor Shafi Khan Chaired the meeting from its start until the arrival of Councillor Flemming.

33/19 Minutes of the previous meeting

At 5:06pm Councillor Fitzpatrick attended the meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 5 September 2019 were agreed as an accurate record with the amendments to:

Page 8 paragraph 2 in the agenda to add: *'there were discussions taking place relating to MOMO'*.

Page 9, to add in line 5 in the agenda: *'there were a few challenges relating to the consultation and there was further in-depth discussion of the consultation and the re-naming of the App'*.

With the above amendment the minutes were agreed.

34/19 Disclosures of interest

There were no disclosures of interests.

35/19 Urgent Business (if any)

There was no urgent business.

36/19 Update on actions agreed at previous meeting(s)

At 5:10pm Councillor Bernadette Khan attended the meeting.

At 5:12pm Councillor Flemming attended the meeting.

Members of the Panel discussed how to follow up on issues that had come to the Panel's attention as this was often missed. It was concluded that an action log would be brought to Panel meetings to update the Panel of any challenges or progression in managing the issues raised. An update was also deemed important for the young people who attended the Panel meetings to show that their complaints were followed through.

ACTION: For the Head of Social Work with Children Looked After and Care Leavers to follow up on the complaint made with the young person and the foster care placement.

*Councillor Flemming directed the remainder of the meeting as Chair.
The order of the meeting was revised to include EMPIRE.*

37/19 Children in Care Performance Scorecard

The Head of Corporate Parenting spoke to the Performance Scorecard. Officers highlighted that the performance had remained stable. One area of improvement was the children's Personal Educational Plans (PEP). One area of concern was the percentage of looked after children's pathway plans being up-to-date.

Officers shared that staff were working very hard to improve the service delivered and reach their target of 85%.

Other highlights noted positive stability of looked after children who remained in a safe placement for more than 2.5 years and children placed within 20 miles of their home.

Members of EMPIRE asked questions relating to pathway plans; why they were red and what the service was planning to do to improve the score. Officers shared that the pathway plan was there to help the young person, within their network, to build a future. Officers noted that there was not enough started for the young people aged 16-19, and the service was doing things differently and were hopeful for change. In addition, there was a new form that the service was implementing to help young people to complete their pathway plans. Training had also been provided to social workers to promote the importance of pathway plans.

Members of EMPIRE further asked about the consequences if a child's social worker did not attend a visit. Officers recognised that the frequency of home visits with a young person was important and more could be done to improve the frequency of visits. Officers aimed for inconsistent visits to be reviewed before complaint stage. Members further added that the young person could complain directly to their Independent Reviewing Officer at the review meeting and it was for the foster carer to support the young person in making a complaint. There were also a series of contact numbers the young person could use to get through to their social worker.

In response to questions raised on how the young person could communicate with their social worker, the Care Leaver Representative offered to do some work around this with the young people and further advocate for them to feel involved.

ACTION: For the Care Leaver Representative (Ashleigh) to run a session for advocacy for the young people.

ACTION: For the young children to receive a consultation document. The Head of Corporate Parenting to lead. [From this the service would develop a pack or book looking at what language to use with looked after children].

The Panel further discussed the importance of child visits and advocacy for young children. With the Independent Reviewing Officer being an advocate for young children at LAC Reviews, the young person would be able to express their feelings and feel confident to make a complaint. Officers further noted that the increase of staff changes within the service had also impacted the performance of child visits.

Officers highlighted that there were improvements within the service where social workers were working towards a practise model for young people to talk directly to social workers about any issues. This way of working would enable the service to endorse social workers to work with their young children.

The issue of vacancy was raised by Members of the Panel and officers noted this as a longstanding issue. Officers informed the meeting that there had been an enormous change within the last six months. Despite service being able to recruit permanent managers and social workers, it was still a slow process.

Members of the Panel were concerned about the stability of staff which was significant to the quality of service a young person received. It was important that this nurtured their relationship and trust, and also affected the regularity of visits to children. Members of the Panel requested to receive regular updates/reports on staff turnover. Officers responded highlighting that the service were ensuring locum social workers were working better with their young person. This was important for each young person all of whom deserved the best service from their social worker.

ACTION: A breakdown report of staff turnover in the fostering section for the last 12 months to return to Panel.

38/19 Exam Results, Exclusion and SEN

The Head of Virtual School spoke to the report and shared that the data within the report had shown the results of the young people in care in Croydon and schools all over the country, and not individual successes.

The results in brief from the detailed report showed:

- Key Stage 1 (6-7 year olds) – results were for reading in phonetics.
- Key Stage 2 (10-11 year olds) – There were seventeen people who took the tests. Figures were close to the national average. Two of the seventeen children had an education healthcare plan and did very well.
- Key Stage 4 (15-16 year olds) – There were seventy-one pupils in the results of which ten did not take exams at GCSE level. Unfortunately the results did not show children who did functional or other qualifications as a substitute to GCSE.
- Key Stage 5 (17-18 year olds) – All persons in this group qualified with a brilliant success showing impressive individual results.

Members of the Panel were pleased to see the positive results of looked after children within the borough.

Co-optee Members of the Panel shared concern with regards to exclusions and fixed term exclusions, highlighting from the report that twenty-one looked after children had received a fixed term exclusion in primary school, and a child in school year two faced permanent exclusion. Members also highlighted that there were no support packages for excluded children and officers pointed out that the issue around support had been rectified and schools would receive better support around exclusions. Further, officers informed the meeting that the service had reviewed the numbers of children excluded in schools and Virtual School had staff members to support primary school

teachers who had children within their schools struggling with emotional wellbeing. Officers also acknowledged a rise with the challenging behaviour of children in schools and a lot of training had been provided. The Virtual School was also encouraging young children to co-develop any training that was offered.

Panel Members mentioned that special schools received support and had a good intervention programme; mainstream schools should be encouraged to develop the same so that more support could be offered to children. Officers of the Virtual School advised that it was their mission to manage the issues with looked after children in mainstream schools.

ACTION: Virtual School to circulate a briefing (SB)

ACTION: Virtual School to circulate updated roles and responsibilities list (SD)

At 5:40pm the Panel adjourned the meeting for a short break

At 5:45pm the Panel reconvened the meeting.

In response to questions from members of EMPIRE regarding the Virtual School for Children in Care, officers explained that a lot of work the service provided was not often seen as staff worked closely with schools and not directly with young people. However, as the service had grown with more staff, there would be more direct work with young people in schools and also in the PEP meetings.

Member of EMPIRE wanted more information about exclusions and what would happen to children excluded from school (both fixed and long term). Officers clarified that for the number of fixed-term (short) exclusions, the Virtual School's involvement entailed liaising with the school and speaking with senior leaders to understand the high numbers of short term exclusions in the school, and to further support the school with working around exclusions. For children with long-term or permanent exclusions the only alternative regime for a young person would be to attend a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). The Virtual School would further aim to provide an alternative school to give the young person an opportunity for a fresh start which would include negotiation with schools and teachers. Support was also provided if a year 11 student was excluded during their exam period; the Virtual School would intervene and provide tuition for the young person.

Additionally, officers highlighted that data was collated on each young person including personalised information and performances. The data gathered also identified exclusion cross referencing gender, ethnicity and age, and to date it was noted that more boys than girls had experienced fixed term exclusion of Black Caribbean background.

ACTION: For EMPIRE to receive a written response to their questions asked (on-going action).

ACTION: For the Care Leaver Representative (Ashleigh) and Virtual School to do a presentation for EMPIRE so they had a better understanding of Virtual School.

39/19 Annual Report of Virtual School (includes update on Mentoring and Careers guidance for Looked After Children and Care Leavers)

At 6:06pm Co-Optee Members EMPIRE left the meeting.

Officers spoke to the report which provided qualitative data. The report highlighted the work of Virtual School and the change in work within the last nine months.

Officers shared that the numbers of young people on the role of the Virtual School fluctuated weekly, numbers were static by the end of the year. Statistics also showed that more of Croydon's looked after children were attending schools within the borough.

Officers further shared that unaccompanied asylum seeking children represented twenty-five different nationalities and there were 350 unaccompanied minors residing in Croydon.

With more children aged fifteen to sixteen going into care, officers talked about funding and how the Virtual School was funding a looked after child until they reached sixteen years old. This highlighted challenges around looked after children aged seventeen years plus who would not receive funding for support.

The report also mentioned that school ratings were tracked by officers from information provided by parents and the schools themselves.

Officers noted that staffing within the service had seen little change as caseloads continued to increase. With a ratio of twenty-two staff to 950 children, this meant staff would be responsible for approximately sixty to sixty-five young children each. Though each child was not seen regularly, each child would be seen up to three times a year and this had been successful.

Officers informed that the Virtual School had provided training to specialist staff to offer bespoke mentoring services for the young people. Pupil Premium Funding was further discussed amongst the Panel and officers announced that though each looked after child was entitled to £2,300 each, this area was under review as the procedure had been a challenge. Officers noted that they needed to explore long-term the costing the involvement of the Virtual School, and how the young people could access funding to meet their needs.

In response to questions from Members of the Panel relating to the Virtual School's involvement in supporting children with mental health issues, officers answered that their involvement was on a case-by-case basis. The Virtual School would escalate the process and work with Children's Services to

review spending. Officers noted that there was a mental health pilot taking place, from which 16,000 students and looked after children would benefit as a result of having been involved in training sessions. The new project was exciting as the services work closely with the Health Services. St Mary's School was the lead school in this pilot. The Virtual School was also employing other professionals to be involved with the training to focus on the quality assurance of the young children's health and wellbeing, i.e. therapeutic services via Educational Psychology services.

In response to questions raised by Members of the Panel relating to statutory school aged children not in education, officers noted that this data was not mentioned in the report. They noted that there were a number of children who did not have a school place. Further questions arose relating to whether the school aged children were monitored or received intervention, and officers informed the meeting that there were twenty children attending an interim provision, fifteen children were in the process of being put into school and there were others who did not receive tuition.

ACTION: To have further information of statutory school aged children not in education broken down, to review as a safeguarding issue. To be brought to the next meeting.

The Panel heard that the young people had spoken positively of the Virtual School and this was well received.

The Chair commended the work that had been accomplished by the Virtual School particularly around local schools and the work with children. Also for more looked after children attending schools within the borough.

At 6:30pm Councillor Bernadette Khan left the meeting

40/19 The Independent Visitor Service and Learning Mentor Volunteer Scheme

The Head of Virtual School spoke to the report and highlighted that the service had developed a bespoke service: the Learning Mentor Volunteer Scheme was specifically for ten year olds who had asked for mentors. The service had trained fifteen to twenty-five volunteer mentors around the needs of the looked after mentee focusing on academic work and progression. Though in collaboration with the Independent Visitor Service (IVS) the Learning Mentor Volunteer Scheme was different as the children themselves had requested this support.

Officers were working with other members of staff running the mentoring scheme to expand the integrated training and have more mentoring support. Officers noted that the demographic change in Croydon had resulted in more young volunteers coming forward, which is positive.

Though members of EMPIRE had left the meeting, they had questions for the Panel that were read and included the definition of an Independent Visitor and the work around Independent Visiting Service.

ACTION: For Care Leaver Representative (Ashleigh) to add work around Independent Visitor Service to the EMPIRE presentation list.

Officers informed the Panel that their service was creating a leaflet to share with foster carers, which was co-produced with EMPIRE, and the leaflet would differentiate between an advocate, Independent Reviewing Officer and Independent Visitor, as there was often a crossover in roles.

ACTION: for Virtual School to produce A5 cards, or a digital version to address the difference between an Independent Visitor, Independent Reviewing Officer, an advocate and a learning mentor with contact details.

ACTION: A possible request for an urban dictionary for the social work team.

In response to questions from Members of the Panel regarding the involvement of care leavers in the independence visiting team, officers clarified that the service was careful in recruiting young people based on their experience. Though young people put themselves forward, the process would include four sessions of training and a final interview.

The Care Leaver Representative shared her experience of completing the Independent Visiting training and added that it was important for the individual to provide a lot of stability so the training could get the best out of the trainee. The service were also open to care leavers becoming independent visitors.

In response to questions from the Chair regarding the membership of learning mentors and how individuals could better support young people, officers confirmed that it was a legal requirement that staff members such as social workers were not permitted to apply to become a learning mentor due to conflicts of interest. Rather there were working programmes for staff to champion a child's education and do more.

ACTION: Legal advice to be sought on the legality of care leavers and other members becoming a mentor.

41/19 Youth Engagement Summer Activities Update

The report highlighted the success of the summer activities. The report specifically reviewed engagement with young children in care, though provision in all locations were available and accessible for all children.

Officers talked of the new youth centre *Legacy* that opened in the north of the borough. It was noted that there was no provision for children in the south of

the borough and therefore difficult for young children in that area to travel to Legacy. Further discussions revealed that extra provision was desired in the south of the borough which was addressed with officers.

The Panel discussed sessions of activities that were not reflected in the report and highlighted the challenges identified, such as the changes in staff and the low numbers of attendees. There were also missed opportunities from an arranged trip to bring together unaccompanied minor young children to become part of EMPIRE.

The Panel heard the feedback from the young people which highlighted their feeling that the groups were not blended together.

Following the feedback to the Panel, officers informed that Youth Engagement Team had been good and consistent within the service, but the service needed a clear session plan for consistency. This would need to cover meetings, topics, planning trips and to include all those involved.

In response to questions from Members of the Panel relating to how every young person in care can automatically become a member of EMPIRE, officers said that every child who became a looked after child would automatically become an EMPIRE member. Additionally, there were further opportunities to engage young people with EMPIRE relationship which continued with care leavers.

The Panel discussed the importance of the Virtual School becoming involved in the relationship with EMPIRE, as there were services that could be offered including Special Educational Needs (SEN) support. With more agencies involved, all services had an important role to play in promoting EMPIRE as this would help it expand. Going forward, every young person would be encouraged to join and participate in activities knowing what EMPIRE was.

ACTION: For the Care Leaver Representative (Ashleigh) and the Virtual School (Sarah) to be added to social care; and for the Virtual School and youth engagement to work closely together, to support groups to sell EMPIRE to the young people.

42/19 How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?

The Panel highlighted the following accomplishments and discussed changes to help Children in Care. This included:

- The positive work the Virtual School had accomplished;
- The summer school activities were positive for the young people in the borough;
- Seeing the school exam results of looked after children in the hope to see more encouraging results;
- The Panel agreed that the young people and care leavers should be encouraged in becoming independent visitors with more training provided

where their experience and story's would be valuable to other young people.

ACTION: To have a mid-year report of Virtual School for evaluation.

ACTION: To have the voice of the child and young people involved in training [offered by Hackney Child and Tainted Love]. Recommended training be offered to every Member for all to have a better understating of the voice of the child. Training to be taken separately to Panel meetings.

ACTION: For the Panel to meet with EMPIRE once or twice a year.

43/19 Work Programme

The Chair requested for the work programme to be revised.

ACTION: To discuss subjects and themes for the Corporate Parenting Panel Work Programme.

ACTION: For the Participation Plan to run alongside the Corporate Parenting Panel work programme and to have a draft participation plan at the next meeting.

44/19 Exclusion of the Press and Public

Not required.

The meeting ended at 7.02 pm

Signed:

Date:

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