

Corporate Parenting Panel

Meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel held on Wednesday, 15 January 2020 at 5.00 pm
in F10, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Alisa Flemming (Chair);

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

Co-optee Members

Virtual School: Shelley Davies, Angela Griffiths, Sarah Bailey;

CLA Designated Health Professionals: Dr Julia Simpson, Fiona Simmons

Health Commissioners: Amanda Tuke

EMPIRE: Young People and Council Staff

Care Leaver Representative; Ashleigh Searle

Foster Carer Representatives: Angela Christmas and Manny Kwamin

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)

Laura Saunders (Senior Commissioning Manager)

Pasquale Brammer (Head of Commissioning and Procurement Children's, Family and Education)

Ian Forbes (Service Manager – Children Families and Education)

Apologies: Councillor Bernadette Khan

PART A

1/20 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2019 were agreed as an accurate record.

2/20 Disclosures of interest

There were none.

3/20 Urgent Business (if any)

There was none.

Update on actions agreed at previous meeting(s)

The officers updated the Panel with the status of the actions agreed at the previous Corporate Parenting Panel:

Children in Care Performance Card:

1. *For a report of the timescales to report back to Committee (for confidence and reassurance that the pathway plans is scrutinised).*

The quality and timeliness around the completion of performance cards were significantly improving, and new care plans had been co-designed with care leavers in Croydon. Social workers were unable to complete these unless they were with the young person to ensure the plans were focused on them. There were currently twenty young people with an outstanding care plan, which had effected the statistics regarding completion, however, this was due to technical issues rather than them not being completed.

In response to questions from the Panel the Head of Social Work with Children Looked After and Care Leavers clarified the following:

- The plans were formally updated every six months with the young person, within 20 days of their review.
- The plans should be continually updated during visits from the social worker.
- The service would continue to seek feedback from the young people regarding the new form to ensure continuous improvement.
- The pathway plans were for the young person to own and co-produce alongside their social worker. The plans were not be completed without the young person being present to ensure they were involved with the full process.
- The electronic care record system monitored when plans had been completed or were outstanding.

Annual Report of Virtual School (Data Update):

2. *Virtual School to provide an overview of the spending in pupil premium.*

There would be an update provided for the next Panel on 4 March 2020.

Following from discussion these actions received further actions, as listed below:

Annual Report of Virtual School (Data Update):

3. *CEO to work with Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care to look at how the service and the Council (as an organisation) could create opportunities to children.*

ACTION – For an update to be distributed to Panel Members and to provide a verbal update at the next Panel on 4 March 2020.

4. *CEO to work with the Director of Human Resources to raise the role of volunteering within the Council to support the Looked After Children Service (assisting young children in reading etc).*

ACTION – For an update to be distributed to Panel Members and to provide a verbal update at the next Panel on 4 March 2020.

5. *To consider and introduce group therapy to young children as an alternative to one to one therapy.*

ACTION – For an update regarding the Steering Group and their progress to be presented at the next Corporate Parenting Panel.

ACTION – The Head of Social Work with Children Looked After and Care Leavers to distribute the various schemes available for young people to receive group and one-to-one therapy to all foster carers.

5/20

Children in Care Performance Scorecard

The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care, Nick Pendry, introduced the report and explained that Children's Services were currently in a period of improvement. In terms of staffing and management, he confirmed that new permanent social workers were due to start soon, which would improve the performance of service, particularly in relation to ensuring pathway plans and care plans were up-to-date.

Panel Members expressed concern for the figures marked as red in the report, in regards to NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training); the Chair agreed with the concerns and requested a full report be presented on the progress with NEET at the next Corporate Parenting Panel on 4 March 2020. The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care also agreed to present the results from the audit activity to the next Panel to show the improvements that had happened, as a lot of ongoing positive work was not captured within the report.

ACTION – To present a full report on NEET to the next CPP on 4 March 2020.

In response to comments raised by a co-optee the Head of Social Work with Children Looked After explained that the target for percentage of Annual Reviews of Foster Carers completed on time was 95%, and was therefore marked as red. She noted that a clear plan for the next year had been established and the reviews would be set at an 11-month target to ensure they were all held timely, therefore, she was expecting 100% of annual reviews to be completed.

A Foster Carer congratulated Children's Services on the improvement she had seen with social workers; an increase of social workers and they were

ensuring looked after children were visited every four weeks. The Foster Carer sought clarification regarding the indicator referenced LAC 10, as it noted that visits should be completed every six weeks. The Head of Social work with Children Looked After clarified that locally social workers were encouraged to conduct home visits every four weeks, however, the reporting was measured against statutory requirements, which was every six weeks.

In response to queries from the Panel in regards to Personal Education Plans (PEPs) the Head of Virtual School explained that the percentage of looked after children with an updated PEP had been reported at 63%, however, these figures fluctuated as they were completed within school term time so were affected by school holidays.

RESOLVED – That the Panel noted the report.

6/20 Children Looked After Health Commissioning and Performance

The Head of Children and Maternity Integrated Commissioning - Amanda Tuke, Senior Commissioning Manager - Laura Saunders, and the Head of Commissioning and Procurement Children's, Family and Education - Pasquale Brammer introduced the report and highlighted the following:

- Statutory guidance required that initial health assessments (IHAs) were delivered within twenty working days of the child becoming looked after. Notification to the Children Looked After nursing team would be received within three working days and the IHA would be delivered within sixteen working days. If the referrals were received punctually then the statutory deadline was almost always met. Health nurses would often speed up the assessment to try and hit the twenty working day deadline.
- The data, included in the report, showed that there had been a significant improvement on timeliness of IHAs compared with previous years, however, they were still looking at strengthening the quality of the assessments.
- Ensuring the management of repayments to outside boroughs were prioritised to maintain a good reputation with commissioners.
- Young people declining health assessments was a challenge, particularly with out of borough children.
- The Health and Wellbeing of Children Looked After Strategic Board chose themes and determined what was working well and where there were areas for improvement; longer term plans were then created and introduced. The Board focused on individual cases, and monitored whether there were any trends with the statistics.
- Focus was emphasised to those young people who had not attended or had declined their health assessments to encourage them to have their assessments; it was not mandatory for the young people to have their assessments after the age of 16 and they had the right to decline.

- The percentage of children in care for the last 12 months who had updated health assessments was 91.4%, as opposed to the two previous years which was 66.5% and 79.4%.
- There was an ongoing review to improve how health pathways for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) could be completed in a timely manner and to improve inclusivity; the challenges with UASC were often bespoke.
- Approximately 100 children in care were referred to South London & Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM) per year, and Off The Record provided support to approximately 150 looked after children, of which almost 100 children were UASC.
- There were high waiting times for young people and a high threshold for young people to meet the requirements of the available services. This was a national challenge, which was continuously improving, and it was noted that Croydon were performing to a higher standard than a lot of other areas across the country.
- From February 2020, the existing multi-agency Single Point of Contact (SPOC) service would expand to include emotional wellbeing and mental health.
- Practitioners from SLaM would be co-located at Bernard Weatherill House, along with specialists from: social care, early help, health visiting services, education, safeguarding, police, and housing services.
- A new online referral form had been developed to ensure all information sharing and user confidentiality concerns had been addressed.
- The service would be evaluated over the next six months after implementation to determine how it was working and identify future developments. This would continually improve the service and ensure there was a more flexible offer to meet the need of the young people.
- A neighbouring borough had held specific training for foster carers regarding mental health and this could be introduced to Croydon.
- SPOC would provide clearer statistics to ensure the health service could be monitored closely.

Dr Julia Simpson, CLA Designated Health Professional, introduced herself and highlighted the following:

- She had held a focus group with young people regarding initial health assessments and it was expressed that they wished to know who would be completing their assessment; what the medical professional looked like, their name and what would be discussed.
- The data collected regarding the assessments undermined what was being achieved with the young people as they would discuss friendship groups, peers and school life with them; the data collected was quantitative and focused on areas such as vaccinations and dental checks.

- An analysis of IHAs was being carried out by Public Health to inform a health report focused on looked after children, which would be completed by the next Corporate Parenting Panel.
- Social workers had been trained to complete new health and safety questionnaires to identify children who should be referred to SLAM.
- There was a staff training day arranged in February 2020 which would focus on the support of UASC.

In response to queries raised by EMPIRE, in regards to health checks for looked after children and confidentiality with GPs, Dr Julia Simpson clarified the following:

- All information collected at the GP was confidential and this would only be shared with other health providers. If the information was to be shared further, for example with foster carers, then the young person would need to give consent.
- Young people may see a different clinical nurse at their health assessment review; however, initial health assessments were usually completed by the same nurse to ensure continuity.
- Doctors would have appointments with any looked after child without their carer once they were verbally capable. There had been recent training to improve the narrative between the health professional and young person to ensure they were able to discuss issues regarding their placement without the foster carer being present.
- Social workers should be involved in the process of health assessments to help the young person and ensure they have an understanding of their health needs; social workers were responsible for reviewing the health assessment in their capacity as a corporate parent. It was added that the young people should not leave an assessment without knowing their health needs and the next steps; health action plans should be shared with the young person and foster carer.
- The young people could make initial contact via telephone and could arrange an appointment with the doctor on their own from the age of 13.
- A record of every health assessment with the GP would be on a young person's file; however, once a young person turned 18 then hospitals and other services would not have access to this information unless the individual chose to share it with them.

A foster carer co-optee member present noted that he had seen a vast improvement in 2019-20 with health assessments, and requested that information regarding the new referral process be sent to foster carers, including those who live outside of the borough. The Head of Commissioning for Children's, Families and Education confirmed that a narrative would be provided to explain how to make a referral to CAMHS for carers, GPs, young people and schools.

RESOLVED – That the Panel agreed:

- 1) to the targets, actions and deadlines as appropriate to improve the timeliness of initial health assessments, coverage of review health assessments and access to emotional wellbeing and mental health services,
- 2) that the outcomes of the CLA health needs assessment, commissioned by the Health and Wellbeing of Children Looked After Strategic Board, would be reported to Corporate Parenting Panel as part of an annual CLA health report and added to the forward plan.

At 1839 hours the Panel adjourned for a short break

At 1846 hours the Panel resumed the meeting

7/20 Annual Report of Adoption Service and Panel (Inc. plans/update of regional adoption agency)

Head of Social Work with Children Looked After introduced the report and explained that Adopt London South (ALS) was a significant change to Croydon, and affected all county and city councils across the UK. The Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) model was in its early stages, however, it had been showing positive signs; it was noted that working as smaller agencies was not the most productive method.

The Service Manager, Children Families and Education, Ian Forbes, explained that he was the lead on permanence and had been working closely to ensure a smooth transition to the RAA model. He highlighted the following to the Panel:

- It had been a challenge in Croydon, and other South London regions, to recruit adopters.
- Adoption Support was in need of improvement and one team had been formed to tackle the increasing demand.
- Two members of staff from Croydon Council had transitioned to working for ALS to work closely with children from Croydon; they met every Monday to track their development plans for adoption. All staff had now been transitioned to permanent posts within the agency.
- The RAA adoption scorecards tracked the young people on a three year average, which would have an impact on timescales and delivery to previously set deadlines; this would need to be highlighted to Ofsted.
- Croydon Council met with the RAA monthly and had good oversight of the service. The young people had been tracked tightly through the transition period and it had been ensured they all had updated adoption plans.

In response to questions asked by a Care Leaver present, regarding the adoption process, the Service Manager clarified the following:

- A means test was completed to establish if the adopter was applicable for Adoption Allowance; it was not similar to the arrangement with Foster Carers' Allowance as not many adopters were eligible and an allowance was not encouraged as they wanted the adopter to claim the child as theirs and not for financial gain.
- The adoption process was voluntary, so the adopters could withdraw at any time throughout.
- Adopters were asked if they were currently trying to conceive and the adoption process would be paused to ensure the young person being adopted was focused on. It was noted that most agencies would ask couples to use contraception throughout the adoption process.
- Prospective parents would provide a book about themselves including their hobbies, pets and photos of their family so the young person could read this with their social worker to develop an attachment. Currently, foster carers did not provide books for the young people, however, by 2021 all foster carers would have completed a profile, which would be viewable by the young person.
- Prospective parents received a 3-4 day intensive training course and would meet children who had been through the adoption process. National and local training courses would continue to be extended to parents throughout the process, material would be recommended and there were support groups available.

EMPIRE enquired as to whether the young person could withdraw from the adoption throughout the process, similar to how the prospective parents could. In response, the Service Manager explained that the majority of children adopted were under the age of five, in some cases they were up until the age of eight. As it was unlikely they were able to verbalise this at a young age Children's Services and the social worker would closely monitor the child's behaviour; if they appeared to be distressed then this would be recorded.

In response to the Care Leaver Representative it was confirmed that a child could request to be adopted at any age before turning 18. Adoption would be explored as an option when the young person first entered care.

It was explained to the Panel that some young people, often those who were older, would have contact with their birth parents so a special guardian order would be encouraged, as opposed to adoption. Permanence planning meetings were held regularly where foster carers would be given the opportunity to ask questions about adoption and apply to be assessed for either adoption or special guardianship.

Councillor Gatland left the meeting at 1905 hours.

It was noted that the South London Commissioning Programme (SLCP) had recently completed two documents called “*All About Me*” and “*All About Us*”, which had been procreated with young people in care; it would be released very soon.

Councillor Fitzpatrick expressed concern for the Annual Report and noted that the presentation of data was difficult to understand. He requested a further report which would clearly state whether there had been any progress, how it was benchmarked and the monitoring that was taking place. There were concerns for the new model and it would be helpful to see how it could be evaluated objectively. The Chair agreed and explained that she would be having a meeting with Children’s Services regarding the forward plan; this would ensure that the Corporate Parenting Panel reports were of high quality and focused. She also agreed that the RAA was a concern for corporate parents and the Panel needed to be assured of the ongoing work and were able to provide feedback.

The Service Manager noted that a quarterly review was completed which provided more explanatory data, both regionally and locally; he agreed to distribute this information to the Panel when it was available.

ACTION – To receive regular reports regarding the RAA, including a breakdown of what was happening with the individual young people from Croydon. It was suggested that these reports would be presented every other meeting.

The Service Manager in Children, Families and Education, Natalie Craig, explained that her experience working in a council in the North East England, who had introduced the RAA model, had been very similar that the initial improvement was slow but showed great benefits over time. She noted that they would continue to keep the ALS RAA under close review, however, it had been reflecting the national picture.

The Head of Social Work with Children Looked After and Care Leavers stated that their priority was to ensure the Croydon young people were receiving the help that they needed; Ian Forbes (Service Manager, Children Families and Education) had weekly meetings with the ALS to discuss each young person from Croydon individually and she would be attending these monthly to scrutinise the work of the ALS. There was also an event in June 2020 which would be attended by all lead members to meet the RAA.

In response to questions from the Panel Members and Chair regarding if there were any incentives offered with adoption, it was explained that the means test mentioned earlier in the meeting was completed for any prospective parents by reviewing their income and outgoings on a case-by-case basis; there was clear legislation which outlined what adopters could receive. It was often those who adopted older children or sibling groups who would receive an allowance. Adoption Support, focusing on emotional support rather than financial, was in need of improvement and this would occur through the RAA.

ACTION – To update the Panel on how the RAA was promoting their national campaign and incentives.

RESOLVED – That the Panel agreed to note the report.

8/20 How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?

The Panel highlighted the accomplishments and discussed changes to help Children in Care.

A big thank you was awarded to EMPIRE and the young people present for attending the meeting and their valuable contributions to the discussions.

9/20 Work Programme

The Work Programme was received for information.

10/20 Exclusion of the Press and Public

This was not required.

The meeting ended at 7.43 pm

Signed:

Date:

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