

Corporate Parenting Panel

Meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel held on Wednesday 18 January 2023 at 5.03pm.
This meeting was held in Room F10, Town Hall, Katherine Street, Croydon, CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Maria Gatland (Chair);

Councillors Samir Dwesar, Mike Bonello, Maddie Henson, Tamar Nwafor, Helen Redfern, and Catherine Wilson

Co-optee Members

Angela Christmas (Foster Carer Representative)

Manny Kwamin (Foster Carer Representative)

Shelley Davies (Director of Education)

Jo Jack (Interim Head of Virtual School & Head of Service for Access to Education)

LaJay Taylor (EMPIRE)

Also

Present:

Roisin Madden (Director for Children's Social Care)

Shaun Hanks (Head of Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People)

Dawn West (Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance)

Anton Stewart (Strategic Lead for Children in Care and Care Leavers)

Jane Scott (Subject Matter Expert)

Amelia Lobo (Social Worker, Children's Social Care)

Apologies:

Councillor Sue Bennett

Co-optee Member: Porsha Robinson (EMPIRE)

Councillor Catherine Wilson for lateness

PART A

1/22 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 23 November 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

2/22 Disclosures of interest

There were none.

3/22 Urgent Business (if any)

There was none.

4/22 Update on actions agreed at previous meeting(s)

The Subject Matter Expert, Jane Scott provided an update on the Corporate Parenting Strategy following the Panel meeting held on 23 November 2022.

- Visits had been agreed following the report recommendations.
- Relating to the co-chair approaches, arrangements in place in other local authorities had been reviewed.
- There had been discussions relating to the events that included young people and partners.
- There had been invitations to attend Corporate Parenting Strategy workshops.
- The development of the strategy was to be drafted in March 2023 for further discussion.

5/22 Update from E.M.P.I.R.E

LaJay Taylor from EMPIRE shared with the Panel activities EMPIRE had been engaged in since the last Panel meeting and their future plans.

- EMPIRE had an end of year celebration: two Christmas parties with DJ's, food, and catering, and fifty organisations donated gifts to the young people.
- Eighteen young people had been confirmed to sit on Children Social Care interview panel's (with other interview panel members) which would encourage more voices heard by young people.
- The Children Looked After promise saw Christmas cards hand gifted to children. The service had followed through promises.

The focus for EMPIRE over the next three months highlighted the following:

In January, the theme of focus would be Mental Health:

- There would be two sessions set up for a vision board. This was a session where all the young people enjoyed and reflected on their previous year.
- There would also be a youth hub and training session on drugs and alcohol.

In February the theme of focus was National Care Week:

- With various activities lined up for the children and care experienced young people care leavers, this included taking the younger children to 'Ninja Warriors' and older young people to 'Go Ape.
- With pancake day also held in this month, cooking was also on the agenda for activities in half term week.
- The training theme for the month would be LGBTQ and sexual health.

In March the theme focus would be Empower and Inspire:

- EMPIRE would be leading on a 'walk for cancer' on 25 March 2023. This was a challenge which had also taken place in 2022 and was attended by some Councillors and Directors which the young people were delighted for their involvement.

6/22 Quality and Safety Review re Children in Care with Disabilities and Complex Needs

The Corporate Parenting Panel considered the report of the Quality and Safety Review re Children in Care with Disabilities and Complex Needs. The Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, Dawn West, provided an overview addressing Croydon Council's review of children living in residential specialist schools registered as children's homes, as part of the National Panel review into Safeguarding children with disabilities and complex needs in residential settings.

In summary, the Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance highlighted the following:

- The data gathered showed that there was a very small number in the cohort relating to Croydon.
- Key multi-agency partners reviewed placements, health, education, and care needs. This also included the voice of a child, which was heard in placements and with families sharing their view of childcare arrangements.
- The findings of the audits highlighted that:
 - No child was found in an unsafe situation.
 - One placement needed reassurance on staffing levels.
 - Signing off medication changes and why it was in the child's best interests needed some improvement.
 - Commissioning Service needs to have had increased oversight and monitoring including inspection protocols.
- The report identified:
 - Children had advocates (some parents were the children's advocate and needed no additional person)
 - Practitioners were able to communicate appropriately with the child.
 - Strengths and difficult questionnaires needed to be adapted for this group of children.
 - All professionals involved were to think about more evidence-based questions to check medical records, behavioural plan and if it was managed and up to date, that there was regular communication with parents, child, and family.
- There was a small task and finish group to see through the actions.

- No safeguarding issues were raised regarding where children were placed.
- Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) was working with the Department of Education that there would be national guidance for LADO's which would mirror the IRO handbook. The LADO role carried out was consistent with work approach. This was a result of the provider information.

The Chair welcomed the very important report that addressed what could be achieved to better support vulnerable children, in addition the aspects of contract within staffing, and how it could be commissioned going forward.

In response to queries raised by the Panel, the Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, Dawn West, clarified the following:

In relation to whether the result of Doncaster would propose another report in the future and fall into the hands of the Independent Reviewing Officer, the Panel heard that should another report be conducted, this would fall within the task and finish group to ensure scrutiny and the confidence of social workers in asking questions. Though there was a lot of information provided, there were gaps highlighted for improvement going forward, which was also similar with other local authority findings.

In relation to advocacy for consideration to children with disabilities including autism, the Panel heard that a non-instructed advocacy and specifically recruited Independent Visitors as an approach would support to raise issues for children with disabilities and autism, which would be a trusted person to raise on their behalf.

In relation to the lack of professionals capturing the voice of a child, particularly of a child coerced in a particular way, the Panel heard that there were various ways to receive a child's voice from a trusted adult, such as obtaining consent from parents to use audio-visual to capture a child's voice or communicating with the parent who would know their child. Appropriate tools and training was also required to support communication with a child which specialist communication needs.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to:

- To note the contents of the report
- To endorse the recommendations of the report

7/22 Annual Report of the Virtual School 2021-2022

The Corporate Parenting Panel considered the report of the Virtual School Annual Report. The Interim Head of Virtual School & Head of Service for Access to Education, Jo Jack; Director of Education, Shelley Davies, and the Strategic Lead for Children in Care and Care Leavers, Anton Stewart,

provided and overview which summarised the achievement of Children Looked After for the academic year 2021/22.

A presentation was shared with the Panel that summarised the detailed report. The Panel heard that:

- At the end of the academic year (as recorded on 08 August 2022) there was 626 children and young people in care, of which a near 50% split between male and female; though it was noted that there was a significant decrease in the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children due to the National transfer scheme.
- It was highlighted that 2022 was the first year of exams post the pandemic and thus it was difficult to compare results pre and post pandemic for the cohort attainments in maths, reading and writing.

Key Stage 2: in 2022, maths and writing went up in percentage compared to reading which went down in percent, in comparison to 2020 exam results.

Key Stage 4: in 2022 all areas (reading, writing and maths) went up in percentage since 2020.

Attendance was also good with a benchmark of 95%. There was intervention by day five if there was a concern on attendance.

Key Stage 5: there was a drop in percentage in level 3 and a slight increase in level 1/2 and entry level.

Post 16: the longevity of contact helped raise aspirations and working on transition from post 16; additionally linking with leaving care service to have access to professionals and providers.

- Education, Employment and Training (EET): there were two phases: (1) developing data and tracking activities to support i.e., weekly drop ins with oversight by manager; (2) working with EET – virtual college approach.
- Personal Educational Plan (PEP): this was a living document tailored record of a young person's education, which involved multiple contributors inclusive of the voice of the child. Every child looked after must have one which was shared with their carers.

The Panel welcomed the report and acknowledged the positive improvement in the cohort attainment of writing and maths.

In response to queries raised by the Panel, the Virtual School Team, clarified the following:

In relation to the mitigation to explain the cohort attainment in reading, and the drop in the standards of study during the global pandemic, the Panel heard that a reading test was not a test of reading skills, it was considered on the ability to understand a text, grammar, and comprehension; and thus, reading a book with a child was vital for the child's learning. It was noted that the teaching of reading and maths was varied in different households. Trauma and change had also affected the results.

In relation to supporting children in their reading, comprehension and understanding of a text, the Panel heard that PEPs was the tool to use to ensure that support was given to a child. All PEPs were held every term. Advisory teachers were also present to support a child for two years, and would follow on to PEPs, secondary school, and education psychology. The service was working with the Independent Reviewing Officer Team to ensure that they were more involved.

In relation to whether there was a specific PEP for children with disabilities, the Panel heard that they had acknowledged discrepancies in the PEP document which had been reviewed and revised for all children. There was also acknowledgment for a more focused way to devise PEPs to understand completing the forms better with all professionals involved.

In relation to the Virtual College and the support and resources for young people, the Panel heard that the service was developing a learning and development programme for staff and foster carers to assist the young people who required additional support, and to understand support. This was to be sat within the Virtual college and was opened to young people up to 25 years old. The purpose was to be aspirational and push to develop the chosen route of the young person and explore their opportunities. The Virtual College would be working across three teams Virtual School, EET Team and Leaving Care Service.

The Chair welcomed the report and presentation and the good work from the service and staff over the years.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to:

Agree the report and considers the key priorities for the Access to Education Service, which form the foundation for the day-to-day operation of the Virtual School.

1. Ensure Croydon's schools take steps to become more inclusive: working in partnership with CSC and LA on issues around race, equalities and safeguarding.
 - Ensure all vulnerable pupils and young people are supported in their education, training, and employment settings to make progress towards better educational outcomes.

- Ensure training advice and guidance is available to all Croydon settings for the inclusion of the most vulnerable.

8/22 Children in Care Performance Scorecard

The Corporate Parenting Panel considered the Children in Care Performance Scorecard which provided an overview of the October month.

In response to queries raised by the Panel, the Head of Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People, clarified that the snapshot highlighted:

- CLA 14 – care plans 0-16. This was at 87% with a target of 90%. The snapshot this week was at 82% and was due to some plans waiting for signing off.
- CLA 15 – pathway plans were at 79% which was due to overdue plans. The target was at 85%. The snapshot this week was at 86%.

Care plans for a looked after child become a pathway plan once they turn 16 years old. Staff were encouraged to support and explicitly inform the values of care and pathway plans as it was not acceptable for a young person to have an out-of-date plan. This was welcomed by the Chair.

- CLA 19 – addressed that on average last year 45% of children looked after had new social workers that had been affected by resourcing and the restructure in the department.
- AD 8 – had been stable with a significant spike. The data was based on a three-year average where one (adopted) child would make a change on the data. There was also a very effective Adopt London South service.

9/22 Exclusion of the Press and Public

Not required

The meeting ended at 7.05 pm

Signed:

Date:

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