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Corporate Parenting Board

Meeting of held on Wednesday, 1 May 2024 at 5.00 pm in F10, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Maria Gatland (Chair); Councillors Joseph Lee, Helen Redfern and Catherine Wilson.

Core Members

Co-Chair, Care Experienced Young Person (voting): KH
Children Looked After/Care Experienced Young People living in and out of Croydon Borough (non-voting): N, S
Carer Representatives (Voting): Angela Christmas, Manny Kwamin
Director of Adult Social Care (non-voting): Simon Robson

Also

Present: Adam Fearon-Stanley (Service Manager)
Anton Stewart (Strategic Lead for Children in Care and Care Leavers)
Cathryn Williams (Team Manager, Children's Social Care)
Deborra John (Head of Service Children in Care & Care Experienced Young People)
Jane Scott (Subject Matter Expert)
Dr Julia Simpson (CLA Designated Health Professional)
Joel Pace-Jr (Youth Service Co-Ordinator)
Róisín Madden (Director of Children's Social Care)
Stuart Black (Social Worker)

Apologies: Councillors Amy Foster & Ian Parker
Shelley Davies (Director of Education) & Charity Kanotangudza

PART A

18/24 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

19/24 Disclosures of interest

There were none.

20/24 Urgent Business (if any)

There was none.

21/24 Update on actions agreed at previous meeting(s)

The Chair asked that these actions be covered under the Performance Report item later in the meeting.

22/24 Update on Protected Characteristic Working Group

The Corporate Parenting Board received a verbal update from the Youth Service Co-Ordinator on the Protected Characteristic Working Group. The Board heard that a consultation with young people had taken place on April 18th 2024 and this had gone well. The young people involved in the consultation had raised questions such as, what are the important areas the protected characteristic should cover, and where would the inclusion of the protected characteristic be most meaningful for young people. The consultation had identified five key areas where young people felt that a protected characteristic would be most important to them.

The Youth Service Co-Ordinator explained that the main concern young people had about a protected characteristic were around stigma and the opt-in/opt-out nature of the characteristic. Young people had continued to raise questions around why this was important at this time in their lives and the meaning behind the characteristic. Young people also had concerns about the lasting nature of being identified as having been Care Experienced and the possibility that they may no longer wish to identify with this characteristic later in life.

The next scheduled meeting of the Protected Characteristic Working Group was set for the 20th May 2024 and was being facilitated through the Head of Safeguarding and Wellbeing for Croydon & Coulsdon Colleges and Croydon Council. This meeting of the Working Group would also include young people who had been looked after outside of the borough and asylum seeking young people. The Chair commented that they would like to see any recommendations from the Working Group fed back to the Board and then on to the Executive Mayor.

Young people spoke about the importance to them of adopting the characteristic being a choice and raised concerns that it could be seen as a label. The Board heard further concerns that the characteristic could be used to discriminate against Care Experienced Young People. The Chair thanked the young people for their feedback and commented on the need for the Board to have a better idea of how young people viewed the characteristic as a benefit or a concern. The Youth Service Co-Ordinator responded that this could be provided for the next meeting of the Board, as the information had already been recorded from previous meetings of the Working Group

ACTION – For the Board to receive a summary of information from past meetings of the Protected Characteristic Working Group about young people’s views of a protected characteristic as a benefit or concern.

The Director of Children’s Social Care explained that there had been a discussion at the Council’s Corporate Management Team (CMT) earlier that day about how corporate parenting was embedded across the Council. The Board heard that the Council’s Equalities Strategy would be refreshed later in the year, which would be a good opportunity to formally embed Corporate Parenting into the processes of the Council. The Director of Children’s Social Care explained that it would be valuable to consult with other councils to explore what work they had done in this area.

ACTION – For the Board to receive an update on the actions undertaken by other Local Authorities to embed Corporate Parenting principals or protected characteristics in their respective Equalities Strategies.

The Service Manager for the Participation Service informed the Board that a survey would soon be launched for 18+ Care Experienced Adults within the Council and in the wider community to give a wider sense of how young people felt about a protected characteristic. The Board heard that guidance had been shared from a recent national conference which could also be helpful in facilitating the Council’s understanding of the experiences of Care Experienced Young People and enabling deeper conversations on the topic.

The Co-Chair explained that they could understand the negative connotations of a protected characteristic but also highlighted that this could be a benefit to young people in certain cases (for example, when applying for jobs). The Carer Representative raised some concerns about the number of recognised protected characteristics, but also highlighted how these could help to open up opportunities for young people. The Chair commented on the importance of listening to young people and acting to best deliver what it was they wanted.

The Director of Adult Social Care Operations emphasised the visibility and profile that the characteristic could bring to Care Experienced Young People and explained how this could be used hold the Council to account and ensure the proper resources were allocated.

23/24 Update from Children's Participation Team & Children in Care Council

The Corporate Parenting Board received an update from the Children’s Participation Team. The Youth Service Co-Ordinator shared with the Board that a new staff member had been on-boarded, bringing the team up to four full time employees. The Board heard that the Children’s Participation Team was starting to see more opportunities to engage with a wider range of young people.

The Board heard that there had been a recent lunch for young people with Mark Riddell MBE (National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers at the Department for Education) and that there had been positive feedback on the progress being made in Croydon. The Chair informed the Board that she had also met with Mark Riddell with officers and that positive feedback had been given on Croydon's improvement journey.

The Board heard about the important work that the Children's Participation Team did in creating spaces where young people could be vulnerable, and that the team had developed 'Principles of Participation' to clarify the ask and expectations of both officers and young people. The Youth Service Co-Ordinator explained that the Team were working on the launch of a new Dementia Café and how young people could be involved.

24/24 Update on Constitutional Changes

The Director of Children's Social Care informed the Board that the Corporate Parenting Panel had now been renamed to the Corporate Parenting Board at the last meeting of Full Council. The Board heard that this had required work across the Council and special thanks were given to the work of Jane Scott (Subject Matter Expert). The Board were informed that there had been some changes to the membership of the Board and a new [Terms of Reference](#).

The Chair thanked all those who had worked on the changes to the Corporate Parenting Board and explained that this showed the Council's commitment to young people and those with care experience.

25/24 Permanence Sub-Group Discussion

The Corporate Parenting Board received a verbal update on the Permanence Sub-Group discussion which had taken place in April 2024.

The Head of Service for Children in Care & Care Experienced Young People and Subject Matter Expert introduced the item and explained that the meeting had been well attended and had including young people ambassadors. The Board heard that the Sub-Group had split into two groups to discuss what 'permanency' meant to young people and how young people felt this was working for them. The Sub-Group had come back together and discussed:

- The importance of defining 'permanency' as this could mean different things to different individuals.
- The importance in the consistency of relationships.
- The way young people were introduced to, and related to, respite care.
- The temporary nature of placements and the difficulties young people had investing in relationships.
- The burden of bureaucracy on young people compared to non-care experienced peers.
- Young people's feelings about being labelled as high-risk.

- The importance of feeling safe for young people.

The next steps would be:

- A Survey for young people around what 'Permanence' means to them.
- An exploration of how permanent homes can be made to feel more 'homely'.
- To look at delegated authority documents for children in foster care to empower foster carers to make more decisions that can give young people additional freedoms.
- Some work around young people being able to participate in activities that peers can undertake as normal recourse without the need for onerous paperwork (e.g. sleepovers).

The Subject Matter Expert explained that some of this work was already in-train and that a Permanence Transformation Group had met earlier in that day to discuss these and similar topics.

The Social Worker from the Fostering Service informed the Board about ongoing work to change the perception of fostering families to make these feel more like an extended family. This had been undertaken by creating a 'Hub' of fostering families who could offer each other respite and create social bonds through leisure activities and shared experiences. The feedback had been that this had felt more natural through the reduced involvement of social workers and the creation of an extended family feeling where young people could feel safe in other households. The Board heard that the approach was helping to also provide support to the foster carers and facilitate skill sharing. The Board heard that the 'Hub' had facilitated natural family contact for brothers in different foster households. The Board were informed that the most important outcome was happier young people who had more of a familial feeling in their households and placements.

The Chair asked how many 'Hubs' had been implemented and heard that this was currently the only one. The Subject Matter Expert explained that the Council was evaluating this work currently and costing up a potential further role out. The Chair commented that it would be good to hear from the young people involved in the 'Hub' at a future meeting. The Chair asked about support being provided to foster carers and heard that a systemic therapist was linked to the 'Hub' as well as support from a supervising social worker.

The Team Manager from Adoption and Early Permanence Service explained that a Court and Early Permanence Team had been set up in October 2023 to improve practice and timeliness in adoption work. The Board heard that since the implementation of regional adoption agencies, Local Authorities had lost a central hub for adoption work which often required specialist knowledge and expertise. With adoption work sitting across a wide practice system, sometimes social workers were only ever dealing with one adoption in their whole career. The Court and Early Permanence Team had been set up to hold the bulk of adoption work, especially for children who were born to families where there had been multiple adoptions and to be a 'hub' of advice

to wider practice system. The Board heard two examples of cases that had been held by the team and how early permanence had been embedded through having a consistent social worker; timely care proceedings; early placements with forever families; lifelong keeping in touch plans; and ongoing relationships between adopters and birth parents to support the child's identity and curiosity as they grew older.

The Chair commented on the important nature of this work. The Service Manager for the Participation Service explained that independent reviewing officers (IROs) had noted the impact of the Court and Early Permanence Team and how this had improved the Council's performance with early permanence.

The Board split into three groups to discuss what the Council could do differently to enhance young people's experience of permanence and to reflect on experiences where individuals had needed to act at short notice with uncertainty.

The Board fed back the following from their discussions:

- The importance of understanding the individual journeys of young people approaching 18 and what 'permanence' meant to them and where help would be most valued.
- That young people felt having a social worker assist a visit prior to moves could help alleviate feelings of anxiety around a move. The Board felt that this would also be helpful for the foster carer and those living in the household.
- That consideration should be given to developing a 'welcome pack' to help introduce new placements.
- The importance of understanding cultural differences between homes; for example, language and expectations.
- The consideration given to the impacts on young people of changing schools.
- The positive and negative experiences young people could have in different homes.
- Understanding what moves felt like for young people and practical ways social workers could 'hold the child in mind' during these times.
- How young people could better be communicated in times of crisis.
- How young people could be informed about placements in the way foster carers are about young people before they are placed into a household.
- The voice of young people in matching and how they could be better involved.
- The possibility of young people inspecting supported accommodation and fostering agencies.
- Consideration of how young people's communities and families are communicated with and involved in moves.
- The need for consistency for children and the importance of staff retention to facilitate this.

- The importance of ensuring everyone is on the same page to achieve the same things in the same way.
- The need for more regular contacts with social workers over the first week of a move or new placement.
- How carers could come together to create community and consistency for young people.
- The introduction of a guide to new homes for young people, explaining where essentials are kept, etc.
- Human connections and the importance of these being consistent to aid future relationship forming for young people.
- The importance of listening to young people to understand their needs.

The Chair thanked the Board for their feedback and stated that they were keen to see the outcomes of the work of the Permanence Sub-Group.

26/24 Performance Report

The Corporate Parenting Board received the Performance report for March 2024. The Director of Children's Social Care introduced the item and the Chair asked for updates to be given on the actions from the previous meeting.

ACTION (20/03/2024) – For the Panel to receive a further update on improvements to the duty system at the next meeting.

The Director of Children's Social Care explained that work continued on email signatures to ensure these contained duty email and contact numbers. The Board heard that a telephone directory was being developed, that could later be rolled out to partners and Council colleagues, to ensure that the correct team or individual could be contacted directly. The Head of Service for Children in Care & Care Experienced Young People explained that work to improve the duty system was ongoing and that a letter was being developed that would be sent to young people, before their Personal Assistants went on leave, to explain the duration of leave and who could be contacted in this period. The Chair commented on the importance of having consistent contacts for young people even during periods of annual leave.

The Youth Service Co-Ordinator explained that, for extended holidays, their team wrote to young people to remind them of who they could contact for help if needed; the Chair praised this practise.

Councillor Wilson asked for an explanation of how work was allocated by the duty system. The Head of Service for Children in Care & Care Experienced Young People explained that the duty team rotated on a weekly basis, with the Team Manager overseeing the duty team. The Board heard that the aspiration was that there was more planning and formal handovers in preparation for duty weeks. The Chair asked what the timeline was for achieving the desired improvements to the duty system and heard that it was expected that this work would take around three months.

In response to question from the Board about how the success of improvements would be evaluated, the Head of Service for Children in Care & Care Experienced Young People explained that mystery shopper calls and dip sampling would be used. The Director of Children's Social Care stated that the aim of the improvements were to create better integrations in the duty system resulting in better outcomes for young people. The Director of Children's Social Care added that the introduction of the Care Leaver App would create an additional point of contact for young people.

ACTION – For the Board to receive an update in three months on the improvements to the duty system and the results of mystery shopping and dip sampling exercises.

ACTION (20/03/2024) – For an update on Pathway Plans to be given at future meetings of the Panel (CLA 15).

The Director of Children's Social Care explained that Pathway Plans were being written, but that managers were pushing these back when they were not of a satisfactory standard. The Board heard this demonstrated that managers were becoming more confident in ensuring that plans were of the expected quality; where Pathway Plans had been audited, none had been found as inadequate. The Board heard that young people were being involved to a greater extent in writing of Pathway Plans.

The Director of Children's Social Care informed the Board that the Pathway Plan form was being rewritten and that the new template would be launched soon. The Board heard that caseloads were currently thought to be reasonable but that there needed to be a look at the annual demand to ensure this could be well managed over the year to avoid demand spikes and ensure that Plans were written at the right time for individual young people.

The Chair thanked the Director of Children's Social Care for the update and acknowledged the explanation given, but asked for a timeline for improvement in this area. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that the quality of the Plans at was equally important to the number up-to-date and that the impacts on young people needed to be considered and measured. The Board asked if some of narrative could be included in future reports for 'red' indicators to better inform the board. The Director of Children's Social Care agreed to this and explained that this detail was available.

ACTION – For future 'Red' indicators in the Performance Report to include some narrative text.

Councillor Wilson commented that Plans needed to be updated where there were significant changes for young people and raised concerns about the number of out of date plans, and the period of time for which this indicator had been 'red'. The Director of Children's Social Care agreed that this was an area that required improvement.

The Co-Chair praised the timeliness of adoptions figures, but raised concerns about health checks (particularly dental checks). The Board heard from the CLA Designated Health Professional that a shortage of local dentists could contribute to poor performance in this area but explained that, where foster carers got in contact to explain that they could not find a dentist, contact details for available services were provided.

The meeting ended at 6.41 pm

Signed:

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Date:

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