

Corporate Parenting Panel

Meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel held on Thursday, 19 July 2018 at 5.00pm in
F4, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon, CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Alisa Flemming (Chair);

Councillors Janet Campbell, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Maria Gatland, Maddie Henson
and Shafi Khan

Apologies: Councillor Helen Redfern

PART A

15/17 **Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 22 March 2018 were agreed as
an accurate record.

16/17 **Disclosures of interest**

Councillor Jerry Fitzpatrick declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of
the Fostering Panel.

17/17 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There was none.

18/17 **The Role of Panel Members & Terms of Reference**

The Panel were presented with a report which updated their Terms of
Reference to take into account new standards and expectations for Corporate
Parenting set out in the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

Work resulting from the Act would include the production of a leaflet for Care
Leavers setting out a comprehensive guide to the local offer. It was noted that
a draft version of the leaflet would be presented at the next meeting of the
Panel in September. The Act also extended the Council's responsibility to
provide support for young people from 21 years old up to 25.

Given the introduction of a new Act and that there were a number of new
Members on the Panel it was agreed that it would be useful to provide training

to bring all Panel Members up to speed. It was also agreed that it would be very useful to hold a workshop to discuss the best way forward in delivering all of the work streams arising from the Act.

Action: To set up a Workshop to discuss how the work streams arising from the Children and Social Work Act 2017 will be implemented

Action: To organise Corporate Parenting training for Panel Members.

19/17 **Review of the Council's Staying Put Policy - Proposal**

The Panel were advised that the Staying Put Policy had been raised as a key issue by Young Voice, who felt that it should be reviewed to consider how it could be made it easier for young people to remain in their foster care setting after turning 18. As a result the Plan had been revised and a new version was presented to the Panel for its input. Although the changes to the Policy were generally welcomed and seen as a positive step towards tackling the concerns raised with the previous policy, there were a number of issues raised by the Panel that needed to be given further consideration.

The Panel discussed how the Policy would impact those choosing to stay put, while in employment over 16 hours a week as in that instance the fee received by the foster carer would significantly decrease. It was agreed that it was important not to provide a disincentive to young people seeking employment or for foster carers encouraging them from doing so, as such it was agreed that this provision needed further consideration.

Various options to address this concern were discussed and while it was acknowledged that there may be an expectation for a young person in employment to contribute to the household, it was not a given. Although there were reservations from some members of the Panel about quantifying the amount a young person should contribute to their household, it was agreed that a three tier system of suggested contributions based on the young person's level of income should be developed. As the scheme needed to be modelled to ensure its viability, it was agreed that further information would be provided at the next meeting of the Panel.

It was noted that foster carers living in the borough did not have to pay Council Tax and as such it was questioned how this could be applied to those living in other areas. It was agreed that further consideration would be given to how foster carers living outside of the Borough could be supported with the cost of Council Tax.

Concern was raised about the language used at review meetings for children and young people as it was felt that by placing the focus on preparing the individual for leaving care, it may lead them to conclude that there were no other options. Although it was acknowledged that there would be circumstances where the foster carer did not want the young person to stay meaning that preparing for this eventuality was essential, in other instances

discussions should remain open to other options including staying put beyond 18 and the possibility of going to university.

Action – To given consideration to how carers living outside of the borough can be supported with the cost of Council Tax.

Action – To model an optional scheme of contributions based on the income levels of the young person.

21/17 **Review of Fostering Services**

In 2017 there had been a review of Croydon's Fostering Service which had presented its findings in a Single Inspection Framework report. The recommendations outlined in the report had been reviewed and put into an action plan which have subsequently been progressed. In March 2018, the organisation, Achieving for Children, was commissioned to undertake a second review to understand the progress made against the action plan.

Outcomes from the review had been split into two categories, namely areas that were working well and others where further progress was required. The areas in which good progress had been made included the focus within the service on positive outcomes, good multi agency support and an improved relationship between the fostering and looked after teams. The main concerns raised related to areas of work where actions were still being progressed and included early permanence moving forward and inconsistencies over management oversight. As a result of this review a revamped action plan was now presented to the Panel for its comments.

In response to a question about the speed of payment to Foster Carers, one of the Foster Carer representatives on the Panel advised that in their experience Croydon had always been very good with weekly payments and although it was sometimes slower with one off purchases, it was generally considered to be good.

It was also questioned whether the number of agency social workers had increased or decreased? It was confirmed that there was still a significant work force issue, with a 40% vacancy level requiring the continued use of a substantial amount of agency staff. In particular there was considerable level of staff turnover in the Assessment and Care Planning Teams, but elsewhere in the Permanence team the staff levels were more stable.

The Panel discussed the application process for prospective foster carers, as it was noted that there was dissatisfaction with the number of foster carers coming through the assessment and the quality of the assessment process. It was confirmed that the Council had a three year contract with NRS to deliver this service, which was now coming to an end and it should be acknowledged that during the length of the contract the quality of assessments had improved. As part of the retendering process for the contract the Council was looking to procure a two year contract with a provider who would be willing to work towards the Council's long term goal of bring the service back in house.

In a discussion about staff morale within the fostering team, it was agreed that the significant reduction in sickness could be taken as an indicator that morale had improved. Furthermore, in both of the reviews conducted in the past year, staff had been happy to participate in the process and had volunteered themselves to be interviewed. The management oversight within Fostering Service was felt to be robust, with further work under way to address identified inconsistencies across the team management.

In response to a concern raised about the support available for foster carers when social workers were on leave or absent, it was acknowledged that this was a slight issue as it could lengthen the response time. However if a social worker was going to be absent their email should be set up with an out of office message providing an alternate contact.

There was a general level of support for the content of the report, but it was suggested that it would be useful to have specific information relating to staffing included alongside the improvement journey the Council was taking. It was intended that going forward there would be a move to an annual cycle reporting from fostering service and in Spring 2019 the Panel would receive an update on the action plan.

23/17 **Work Programme 2018/19**

The Panel reviewed its work programme setting out the items to be considered at each of the meetings remaining in 2018/19. It was noted that there was flexibility to amend the work programme as required should new items be identified, such as the Annual Independent Reviewing Officer report which would be presented at the next meeting in September.

24/17 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

Not required.

The meeting ended at 7:10pm

Signed:

Date:

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