



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE
Thursday 12 February 2015 at 5.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Moher (Chair) and Councillors Colacicco (for Conneely), Councillor Dixon (for Thomas), Hossain and Warren

Also present: Caroline MacGinnis and Paul Egunjobi (Care In Action)

Apologies were received from: Councillors Conneely and Thomas.

1. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 December 2015 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

2. **Matters arising**

Members asked for a progress report on the development of the Looked After Children website and heard that the young people had met with the council's web design team and web coordinator. Mock pages had been developed for consultation. The young people had made suggestions for the site to be more interactive and suggested additional items for inclusion. Arrangements would be made for a follow up meeting.

3. **Deputations**

None.

4. **Children in Care - feedback on Transition to Independence document**

Caroline MacGinnis and Paul Egunjobi (Care In Action) were present to give feedback on the Transition to Independence document. Caroline MacGinnis was pleased to report back on the first meeting of the Care Leavers Care In Action meeting which took place on 27 January 2015. Discussion included the impact of leaving foster care and what could have put in place to make the move easier. A pack for care leavers was suggested which would include tips such as ways of diary management and how to pay bills. Additionally, it was felt that a social worker visit at the start and every six to eight weeks would have been invaluable. The next Care Leavers CIA meeting would take place in March 2015.

Paul Egunjobi added that other suggestions on how support for care leavers could be improved included a preparation for independence check list, advice on dealing with utilities and benefits services, a mock tenancy agreement to help explain legal terminology and advice on bidding for housing. It was also suggested that a support network of successful professionals who had been in care be established, to give

survival tips. It was hoped that the new website would be an opportunity for questions to be raised. Also suggested was monitoring of the advice given by foster carers on food preparation and a starter pack of essential cooking equipment or a list with advice on shopping. Additionally, a phased handover and introduction to the social worker was felt to be essential with an indication of the frequency of visits from social workers after moving into independent accommodation.

Members were welcomed the initiative and were impressed by the feedback from CIA which illustrated the enormity of the transition. Ann Holmes (Head of Care Planning and Children in Care) advised that some suggestions were already in progress such as advice on tenancy agreements and council housing bidding scheme and the document would be a working tool helping to prepare young people for independence.

5. Fostering Quarter 3 report

The report from the Strategic Director, Children and Young People provided information on the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it achieved good outcomes for children, in accordance with Standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011). The report covered the third quarter of the reporting year and had attached relevant statistical data from the previous reporting year to allow comparison with other west London boroughs.

Ann Holmes (Head of Care Planning and Children in Care) highlighted the key findings on fostering placements, including large sibling groups and challenging teenagers, activities to encourage engagement, work with west London boroughs and support for carers.

Questions were raised on the number of children in foster care over the age of 11 as a proportion of the overall LAC population, social work attendance at meetings of the Fostering Panel and the process for foster carers' annual reviews.

The committee heard that while a foster carer's social worker was in attendance at panel, it was the children's social workers who sometimes were hindered from attending due to an emergency. It was accepted that a substitute arrangement needed to be put in place. On annual reviews, the committee noted that the foster carer was taken through performance under a number of headings including quality of care, change of status, ability and a report was then compiled by the fostering review officer. Some would be the subject of discussion at the Fostering Panel or addressed by the foster carer's social worker. The young children in foster care were helped to give their views.

RESOLVED:

that the content of the Fostering Quarter three report be noted as evidence that the management of the fostering service was being monitored to promote good outcomes for children.

6. Performance Scorecard - Quarter 3

The committee considered the Corporate Parenting Performance Scorecard for Quarter three (October – December 2014) together with a commentary circulated in

advance of the meeting, on those areas which were RAG rated as red notably stability of placements of looked after children, percentage of care leavers in education, employment or training, percentage of LAC and care leavers with an up to date Pathway Plan, the percentage of permanent social workers and managers in the LAC service and the percentage of looked after children placed with Brent foster carers. The Strategic Director, Children and Young People, made reference to the national and regional challenge of recruiting and retaining permanent social workers and the technological initiatives introduced in Brent to support staff which helped to reduce social work pressures. Additionally, the council was working with an Innovations Fund programme to deliver a social work transformation programme, Signs of Safety, which would benefit all staff.

The committee discussed the challenge of retaining permanent social workers and the reasons why often staff opted to work for agencies. The Director stated the circumstances were complex and included the tendency for the profession to be charged with a greater responsibility for child protection even though other agencies were involved, the cost of living in London and reduced pension incentives. She took every opportunity to promote Brent as the place to work. Ann Holmes (Head of Care Planning and Children in Care) added that the recruitment of social workers was on going and there was a need for experienced staff. She advised that the training programme for the forthcoming year was under review with a variety of packages on offer, depending on experience.

The committee noted reference in the report to missing children in the west London area and requested a report to a future meeting on the position in Brent.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the Performance Scorecard for Quarter 3 be noted;
- (ii) that a report on children missing from care be submitted to a future meeting.

7. **Work programme 2015**

The committee considered the work programme for future meetings. The following reports were added to the meeting scheduled for July 2015:

- Signs of Safety
- Child Sexual Exploitation

8. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 6.15 pm

R MOHER
Chair