



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

Tuesday 21 July 2015 at 5.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Moher (Chair) and Councillors Conneely, Hossain and Thomas

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

1. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 April 2015 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

2. Matters arising

None.

3. Deputations

None.

4. Children in Care

The committee heard that Leilani Mensah-Manuel had stood down from the position of Chair of Care In Action and that Paul Egunjobi would be acting chair until September 2015. Paul Egunjobi reminded that there were Care In Action groups for different aged children 7-12, 13-18 and the Care Leavers Group. He updated the committee on the outcome of the Care Leavers Review meeting which had focussed on independent and semi independent living followed by a workshop on 25 June attended by foster carers, key workers and representatives from council departments including, Brent Housing Partnership and strategic commissioners. It was an opportunity to work through the process of coming into care and identify how to improve systems.

Caroline MacGuinness gave an update on plans for a fun day due to take place on 6 September 2015 with theme of health. Ideas had been submitted for possible competitions, games and stalls including some on sexual health. A planning committee would co-ordinate the event. Caroline MacGuinness also advised of plans for a summer activity to take place at Hillingdon Outdoor Activities Centre, for all ages, to promote CIA and an opportunity for foster children to meet. The date was to be confirmed.

The committee congratulated Paul Egunjobi on attaining the Amos Bursary and the opportunity to travel to Belize and shadow a Supreme Court judge.

5. Brent Adoption Service report - 1 October 2014-31 March 2015

The report from the Strategic Director, Children and Young People provided information about the general management of the adoption service and how it was achieving good outcomes for children. The report detailed the activity of Brent's Adoption Service from 1 October 2014 to 31 March 2015. Nigel Chapman (Head of Placements) highlighted the performance data in particular the improvement in the average time between a child entering care and moving to their adoptive family which was (positively) above the England average and the percentage of children who wait less than 18 months which was in line with the England average, on the basis of up to date Brent data. Nigel Chapman referred to the national reduction in the number of children who were subject to placement orders and the fact that there were more approved adopters than children waiting and the support given to prospective adopters while they waited. Members also heard of the Adoption Support Fund, a new initiative where Brent are to begin applications and an update will be provided at the next meeting.

Nigel Chapman referred to the work of the West London Adoption Consortium which he currently chaired and which comprised eight local authorities and voluntary organisations. He also referred to the recent Queen's Speech which encouraged the establishment of regional adoption agencies. Work would continue to see how agencies could work together more closely. The Strategic Director, Children and Young People, Gail Tolley, agreed that the West London Adoption Board was best placed for West London play a key role in pan London initiatives and proposals would be put before the London Chief Executive's meeting.

Members raised questions on the Adoption Support Fund, available throughout England to adoptive families since May 2015 and heard from the Gail Tolley that consultation had taken place with the Department for Education. The position next year was unclear. Questions were also raised on the therapies resourced by the fund and Nigel Chapman advised that most of the children in care did not meet the Child and Adolescent Mental Health threshold and so funding was used to provide supplementary services and ring fenced for Looked After Children and children with disabilities. Isha Coombes (Brent Clinical Commissioning Group) confirmed that the CCG still invested in CAMHS and that CNWL was the main provider.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

6. Brent Fostering Service quarterly monitoring report - 1 January - 31 March 2015

The report from the Strategic Director, Children and Young People provided information about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it was achieving good outcomes for children, in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011). The report covered the fourth quarter of the reporting year and a summary of the whole year position.

Nigel Chapman (Head of Placements) outlined the position on placement activity including the number of children placed with relatives or family friends. The 6% reduction in the LAC population was attributed to swifter planning and front line work with a higher number placed closer to home. Vacancy levels were consistently low at less than 10% of capacity however there was concern over a general reduction in interest and efforts were being made to target effectively. He drew

members' attention to the training and support on offer including the fostering newsletter for Spring 2015 and the introduction of a programme of social pedagogy training for selected foster carers. A report back on this could come to the next meeting. For the coming year, the challenges included increasing the quality of the pool of in-house carers and to target specialist training for some foster carers.

Members raised questions on the impact of the under-occupancy charge legislation (the 'bedroom tax') and heard that foster carers were exempt from the provisions. Nigel Chapman assured them that in the event of there being no in-house foster carer capacity, the council would approach an agency. Members also raised questions on the reasons for terminating fostering households' approval and whether it was felt that the safeguarding signals in place were sufficiently robust. The committee heard that the reasons for foster carer termination included health or relocation and that regular foster carer visits and reviews took place, including the review by the Fostering Panel every three years. Gail Tolley advised that any concerns would be reported to her and the Lead Member. In response to a question members heard that one child had been placed abroad and asked for information on foreign placements to be included in future reports.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring report for 1 January to 31 March 2015 be noted;
- (ii) that future reports contain more detail on reasons for fostering terminations and also on placements abroad.

7. Ade Adepitan Short Break Centre Annual Report 2014/15

Nigel Chapman (Head of Placements) introduced the report which provided information about the general management of the Ade Adepitan Short Break Centre (SBC) opened in February 2013 and how it was providing good services for disabled children within the borough, accessed by 68 children and young people. The report detailed the activity of the SBC from April 1 2014 – 30 March 2015. In introducing the report, he drew attention to the occupancy levels including the 23% increase in overnight stays and the achievements of the service particularly in helping to develop life skills and Nigel Chapman drew attention to the findings of the stakeholder survey which were very positive. He also acknowledged concerns expressed by parents (all of which had been satisfactorily resolved), referred to the outcome of Ofsted inspections which were good and outlined challenges for 2015/2016.

Members welcomed the report and raised questions on the staffing composition. They heard that there were 20 permanent and five regular agency staff. They suggested that, as an indication of support, consideration be given in future to holding meetings at the centre or The Village School which was on the same site.

RESOLVED:

that the report be noted.

8. Annual Corporate Parenting report 2014-2015

The Strategic Director, Children and Young People introduced the report on the outcomes for Looked After Children (LAC) as required by the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2011). Gail Tolley drew attention to the work of the committee over 2014-2015, the profile of the LAC and care leavers and progress on care proceedings. She also referred to the number of children who went missing from care over the period and plans in place to help keep them safe and minimise risks. The Director also outlined the authority's work with the Child Sexual Exploitation Sub-Group of Brent's Safeguarding Children's Board. She was pleased to report on education and training and Brent's achievement in having a higher proportion of care leavers in higher education than neighbouring boroughs. Priorities for 2015-16 included improving placement choice and supporting vulnerable groups.

Members welcomed the achievements outlined in the report and asked questions about the work of the Safer London worker provided through funding from the London Mayor's office and requested more information on support for young women affected by Child Sexual Exploitation from the Barnardos Young Women's Project. Graham Genoni (Operational Director) emphasised the need to find ways to engage with young people who were at risk to help improve their safety and to promote the support available to them. Tribute was also paid to educational support from the Virtual School and the positive Key Stage 2 results.

RESOLVED:

that the Annual Corporate Parenting report 2014-15 be noted.

9. **Forward Plan 2015**

The committee noted that the Fostering reports for quarters 1 and 2 would be discussed at the November meeting and then the next submitted after 31 March 2016. A report on IRO service would come to the November meeting.

10. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 6.35 pm

R MOHER
Chair