



## **MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE**

### **Tuesday 25 October 2016 at 5.00 pm**

#### **PRESENT:**

Councillor W Mitchell Murray (Chair), and Councillors Conneely, Hossain, Thomas and Warren

#### **1. Declarations of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest received from Members.

#### **2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

**RESOLVED**, that the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 19 July 2016, be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

#### **3. Matters Arising (if any)**

Nigel Chapman (the Council's Operational Director for Integration and Improved Service) advised that a Member Development training session on Corporate Parenting had been arranged for December and invitations would be circulated to Members imminently.

#### **4. Deputations (if any)**

There were no deputations received.

#### **5. Feedback from Care in Action and Junior Care in Action**

Representatives from Care In Action (CIA) updated the Committee on relevant developments since the previous committee meeting. HM (CIA) advised that Nigel Chapman (the Council's Operational Director for Integration and Improved Service) had attended a joint meeting of CIA and Care Leavers in Action. During his visit, discussions were held regarding issues experienced by the young people when engaging with Brent services. Particular issues of concern had included an incident of miscommunication between a young person and their social worker's manager and a lack of clarity regarding their entitlement to financial support, which it was felt was inconsistently interpreted by staff. The suggestion by Nigel Chapman that members of CIA attend staff meetings to talk directly to members of staff about the impact of such issues, was welcomed.

KB (CIA) informed Members that a workshop had been held in June and the two issues voted to be of most importance to the young people attending were delays in decision-making and the impact on a child or young person if members of staff did not adhere to the Brent Pledge to children and young people in care. It was

emphasised that if there had to be delays in decision-making it was important that social workers were honest and communicated clearly with the young person affected.

JBK (CIA) advised that a fun-day had been held on 24 August 2016, which had been attended by children, young people, social workers and foster carers. Activities had included T-shirt designing, keep fit sessions, a raffle and a mini-zoo and it was felt that the day had been a success and was widely enjoyed. There had also been a stall for people to view the CIA website and submit suggestions for improvement. The Committee was reminded that it was National Care Leavers' Week and an event marking this would be held the following day.

The Committee thanked the representatives of CIA and sought further details of the concerns raised and the actions taken to address these. Members also questioned whether the types of issues highlighted remained broadly similar over time. In response, KB advised that issues varied considerably from person to person. Shirley Ricketts (Children in Care Participation Worker) explained that the concerns regarding financial support related specifically to care leavers and the type of expenditure that could be provided for by the local authority. The young people concerned had been directed to the Council's leaving care financial procedures document available on the website. Gail Tolley (the Council's Strategic Director for Children and Young People) informed the Committee that there would be a formal re-launch of the Brent Pledge to children and young people in care and suggested that this could be scheduled to coincide with the member training session on corporate parenting.

**RESOLVED**, that the update provided by representatives of Care in Action be noted.

## **6. Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report**

The Committee considered the Annual Report for 2015/16 of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), which detailed the contribution of the IRO Service in Brent. Goitom Mebrahtu (Team Manager, Safeguard and Quality Assurance) drew Members' attention to the summary of key messages for 2015-2016 and highlighted the role of the IRO service in supporting improvements made. Members heard that the timeliness of care planning and the level of participation of children and young people had improved from the previous year, whilst there had been a reduction in the percentage of children who had experienced three or more placements. Further work was required to minimise the number of changes of social worker that a child might experience. Children had said that they valued the continuity provided by their IROs and there had been incidents in which intervention by the IROs had ensured that a child had been appropriately consulted about a change of placement. Whilst Ofsted had positively mentioned the IRO service following an inspection held in October 2015, it had been highlighted that greater consistency was required in recording by IROs and an improved minutes' template had subsequently been introduced.

Members thanked the officers for the report and suggested that future reports would be improved by the inclusion of comparable figures for neighbouring authorities and national averages, along with anonymised case studies and analyses at ward level. It was noted that the fourth bullet point under paragraph 5 of the report should refer

to 11-15 years and the Committee asked officers to amend this accordingly. A Member queried the reason for the larger proportion of male children and young people in care in Brent. A concern was raised regarding the ethnic diversity of the IRO service, though the representativeness of the service in terms of gender balance was considered to be good. Members were also pleased to note the stability of the IRO service and the value that Brent's children and young people in care placed on this. With reference to the target to ensure that pathway plans were consistently available for all young people in care from the age of 16, details were sought regarding the housing options available to those young people. A Member questioned whether officers had any concerns regarding the level of use of advocacy services and clarity was sought regarding the mention in the report of a court ruling on the use of Section 20.

Gail Tolley (the Council's Strategic Director for Children and Young People) advised that discussions regarding the diversity and representativeness of the IRO Team had been held with the provider of the service, though staffing continuity was considered paramount. Further information regarding the housing options available to young people in care would be provided in a subsequent report to the Committee.

Nigel Chapman (the Council's Operational Director for Integration and Improved Service) advised that the larger proportion of male children and young people in care in Brent reflected the number of nearly all male unaccompanied minors who were looked after by the Council, along with the impact of issues such as gang affiliation. A project seeking to help address this latter issue was currently being commissioned with three other boroughs using BIG lottery funding. The project aimed to provide multi-systemic therapy to families who were committed to tackling this problem. Goitom Mebrahtu advised that advocacy services were always provided when requested, which was often at the suggestion of the IRO involved, though awareness of the service could be raised.

Addressing the query on Section 20 agreements, Nigel Chapman explained that these allowed a local authority to take a child into care with the consent of the parent or person with parental responsibility. However, a recent court ruling had determined that some local authorities had failed to actively seek parental consent for a child to be accommodated under Section 20. As a consequence of this ruling, the Council had reviewed relevant cases and returned to court to obtain Care Orders where necessary to ensure parental consent could be provided by the local authority.

Members requested that a report be provided to a future meeting of the Committee on the project currently being commissioned to provide multi-systemic therapy to families.

**RESOLVED**, that the report be noted.

## **7. Brent Virtual School - 2016 Provisional LAC Outcomes**

Janet Lewis (Head of Virtual School) introduced a briefing paper updating the Committee on the provisional Looked After Children (LAC) academic outcomes for 2016 for Key Stages 1, 2 and 4. The cohorts for each stage were small and only included children and young people who had been in care for at least a year.

Members were reminded that a full report analysing the confirmed outcomes and including details of the Early Years' Foundation stage would be presented to the Committee in February 2017. At this time, a briefing would also be provided to the Committee on the introduction of new performance measures (Attainment 8 and Progress 8) for KS4 and the implementation from 2017 of a numerical results system for GCSEs. The figures presented for KS4 in the paper before the Committee referred to the previous performance measure of five A to C grades at GCSE.

Janet Lewis highlighted that the results for KS1 were encouraging and compared favourably to national averages. There had been significant changes to the national assessment for KS2, which meant that outcomes could not be compared to previous years. As part of these changes, a higher expected standard had been introduced, resulting in a sharp decline nationally in the percentage of children meeting this standard. Brent's LAC KS2 cohort had achieved mixed results and all were being provided with additional support in year 7. Nearly all children in this cohort had a Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and four children had Education, Health and Care plans. Three young people (seventeen per cent) of the Brent LAC KS4 cohort had achieved five A to C grades at GCSE, which compared favourably with the national average of fourteen per cent. It was highlighted that the percentage of young people in this cohort who were in employment, education or training (EET) had decreased slightly from July 2016, reflecting a move to Year 12 and subsequent decisions by some young people not to proceed with courses. The virtual school was supporting the production of PEPs for all Year 12 and 13 pupils who were looked after by the local authority and contact was being made with social workers and personal advisors.

In the subsequent discussion, Members queried whether the results achieved by the KS2 cohort of LAC represented good or poor progress for those particular children. Questions were also raised regarding how the Virtual School would support children in meeting the new, higher expected standard and Members expressed concern that thirty-three per cent of children had a placement change and eleven per cent a school change in their GCSE year.

Janet Lewis noted that progress was measured for children and that there had been some very good progress made by the KS2 cohort. A full analysis of this progression would be provided in the report due to be considered by the Committee in February 2017. The local authority ensured that all LAC were placed in good or outstanding schools, with a few exceptions to support continuity for a child. It was considered that the academic progress made by children reflected both the quality of education received in school as well as the support and encouragement they received from carers and other significant adults in their lives. The local authority therefore had an important role to play in assisting carers in nurturing a child's educational development. Addressing Members' concerns regarding placement or school changes, Chris Chalmers (the Council's Head of Looked After Children and Permanency) advised that it was highly likely that those changes would be considered positive moves, for example a move to a permanent placement.

**RESOLVED**, that the briefing paper be noted.

## 8. **Brent Adoption Service Report: 1 April 2016 - 30 September 2016**

Chris Chalmers (the Council's Head of Looked After Children and Permanency) presented a report on the performance and activity of the Brent Adoption Service between 1 April 2016 and 30 September 2016. Members heard that the Council's performance against the two most significant performance indicators, had continued to improve, with a reduction of nine per cent in the period from a child entering care to being placed for adoption (indicator A1) and a reduction of thirty-seven per cent in the time between the courts authorising a plan of adoption for a child and an adoptive match being approved (indicator A2). At 30 September 2016 there had been eleven Looked After Children (LAC) with a plan for adoption who had not yet been adopted. Of those eleven children, four were yet to have adoptive matches identified for them. The number of children requiring adoption continued to be lower than the number of approved adopters; there were currently seven approved prospective adoptive households and a further five adopter assessments in progress. It was explained that the Council was obliged to offer Adoption Support for a period of up to three years if an adopted child resided outside of Brent and throughout childhood for those within Brent. There were currently seventy-eight families receiving on-going post-adoption support and during the reporting period there had been six new requests for support which were being assessed. Highlighting some of the broader issues affecting adoption, Chris Chalmers advised that, from 7 October 2016, immediate changes had been made to the allocation of Adoption Support Fund monies with a cap of £5,000 placed on the amount of support available to individual children. A funding shortfall was anticipated and this could not be accommodated by the Council. Work was currently underway to quantify future need and explore more cost effective means of delivering therapeutic support. In concluding her presentation, Chris Chalmers advised that a report would be presented to the Cabinet in December 2016 on the Regionalising of Adoption, which would seek agreement, in principle, to joining a London Regional Adoption Agency (RAA).

Members commented on the significant degree of improvement against indicator A2 and suggested that comparable performance data for neighbouring boroughs should be provided. Details were sought as to why approved prospective adopters might resign and Members queried the disadvantages, if any, to joining a RAA.

Nigel Chapman (the Council's Operational Director for Integration and Improved Service) advised that the cohort of LAC was relatively small and therefore average figures recorded against the indicators A1 and A2 could be significantly affected by one child's circumstances. The Adoption Score Cards for other authorities could be viewed online and links to these would be provided in future reports. Chris Chalmers advised that adopters might have to wait a long time for a match and this could be dispiriting. Nigel Chapman further explained that the Council would have to join a RAA but could determine which model to pursue. The Council was currently a member of the West London Adoption Alliance but that did not deliver the economies of scale required. Further work was required to explore the implications for service delivery and staffing.

**RESOLVED**, that the report be noted.

9. **Brent Fostering Service: Quarterly Monitoring Report 1 July - 30 September 2016**

The Brent Fostering quarterly monitoring report was presented to the Committee by Chris Chalmers (the Council's Head of Looked After Children and Permanency). Members' attention was drawn to the corporate performance targets for placement activity and it was emphasised that these were very close to being met. There had continued to be a rise in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) approaching the Borough for support and within this, there had been a greater number of older aged UASC entering the care system. Outlining the fostering capacity as at 30 September 2016, Chris Chalmers advised that there were twelve fostering households with one bedroom place available, which equated to approximately ten per cent of total capacity. There had been a lot of recruitment activity over the summer including attendance at a series of fun days and a very effective new social media campaign. There were currently sixteen assessments of prospective foster carers underway, which put the Council in good stead to meet the target of twelve to fifteen foster carers being approved within the financial year. A review of the retention of foster carers and how the allowance and support provision compared to other fostering agencies was being conducted, the findings of which would be reported to the Committee in the next quarterly monitoring report. An Annual Foster Carer Conference was being arranged for November 2016; this would have a theme of resilient foster carers and information would be provided on the Brent Council Pledge to Children and Young People in Care. Outlining future developments affecting the Fostering Service, Chris Chalmers detailed the development of the social pedagogy programme, which had commenced in October 2015 and comprised a training programme that had included foster carers and social workers. A principal social worker would now be appointed for the project and a steering group established to progress the project plan.

In the subsequent discussion, Members noted the growing numbers of UASC and queries were raised regarding the support provided for different types of placements, including kinship placements, foster placements and placements outside of the Borough. Nigel Chapman explained that the Council provided the same level of support, including financial support, regardless of the type of placement and the requirement to do so had been established by case law.

**RESOLVED**, that the report be noted.

10. **Any other Urgent Business**

It was noted that a briefing would be provided to members following the close of the meeting on the developing situation regarding UASC.

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The meeting closed at 6.40 pm

W MITCHEL MURRAY  
Chair

