



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

Held on Tuesday 24 October 2017 at 5.10 pm

PRESENT: Councillors M Patel (Chair), Conneely, Hossain, Kansagra and S Choudhary

Also Present: Councillor McLennan

1. Apologies for Absence and Clarification of Alternate Members

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Thomas. Councillor S Choudhary was present in his place, as substitute. The Chair specified that Councillor Conneely had given an apology for lateness.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

3. Deputations

There were no deputations received.

4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 27 July 2017 be approved as an accurate record.

5. Matters Arising

Gail Tolley (the Council's Strategic Director, Children and Young People) questioned whether the Looked After Children (LAC) Annual Health Report would be combined with the presentation on Health Assessments for LAC (agenda item number seven of the meeting) as had been agreed at the last meeting of the Committee. Jacinth Jeffers (General Manager, Children's Services – Brent, London North West Healthcare NHS Trust) confirmed that it would be referenced within the presentation but was yet to be ratified through their internal governance process.

6. Update from Care In Action Representatives

The Chair welcomed CM, HM and PE (speakers) and other representatives from Care in Action (CIA) who were observing the meeting from the public gallery. CM, HM and PE were then invited to provide their respective updates.

CM began and said that CIA representatives had recently attended a very interesting event at London's City Hall called 'Take Care' which comprised a variety of different sessions and topics about children in care. CM spoke about how informative they had found the personal development sessions which had included a life coaching discussion and also explored the different ways that Personal Advisers (PAs) could assist Care Leavers on the different issues that they might be

going through. CM said that they had very much appreciated an illustrative drama piece on this issue (which had demonstrated a personal adviser working to ensure their young person had a laptop available to them at college) giving them a new perspective on the hard work that social workers and PAs undertook within their roles. CM also explained another discussion session which considered what 'having a voice' meant and the different ways that Care Leavers could express themselves in planning their future. CM stated that they were happy at the respect being shown to Care Leavers, as they were ultimately the experts in planning their own lives. CM also noted that they had received a presentation about the London-wide Care Council, the meetings of which two representatives from CIA were due to attend.

CM continued and explained the artistic elements to the event which had included an innovative project by the City of Westminster which had encouraged young people in care to express their feelings through art. CM outlined what a unique and positive idea that they felt this was and how it was very exciting that young people would have their work shown in the Tate gallery and other art museums. Members also heard about another drama piece, coordinated by the London Borough of Wandsworth, which had highlighted instability and what can go wrong with young people's lives if they are moved from different social workers frequently. CM said that they had identified strongly with this play as they too felt that they had been adversely affected by frequent social worker changes. CM concluded by emphasising how much they had enjoyed being able to communicate with young people from other boroughs and Councils, particularly during the break times. They explained how they had spoken to young people from Essex Council about gardening and looking after allotments, which they found very intriguing and something that they would like to try in future.

HM spoke positively about their recent CIA meeting which had focused on the Council's London Borough of Culture bid. Members heard that CIA representatives appreciated being involved in the bid process and that they felt that they were being listened to in terms of both their positive and negative experiences of Brent as a place to live. HM also described the summer fun day at Poplar Grove Centre, which had involved an array of entertaining activities such as: t-shirt designing; personalising bangles; nail art; football competitions; a sack race; a mini zoo; DJ'ing workshop; and a raffle. HM also explained that there were a number of different stalls which had offered advice on health issues, drugs and alcohol amongst others which they had found useful. They said that they had really enjoyed the day and that they could not wait until the next fun day event.

PE spoke about a care leaver's consultation event which they had attended in August which had focused on the Council's local offer to Care Leavers and the 'Care Leaver's Charter' which was planned to be launched. They explained how they were pleased to have made significant contributions at the event, such as having suggested to make the offer 'friendlier' to young people and through more elements being in e-form such as an app. They also spoke about how they had enjoyed a budgeting exercise which split those in attendance into different Council departments and asked them to consider the most important of the Council's service areas to spend money on. PE noted that it was extremely interesting that each young person had come up with different ideas and had different opinions as part of the process.

(Councillor Kansagra joined the meeting at 5.20pm)

Members thanked CM, HM and PE for their contributions and referred to the discussion that the CIA representatives had had about their experiences of Brent as part of the consultation meeting on the London Borough of Culture bid. Questions arose which asked the CIA representatives what they viewed positively and negatively about Brent. HM stated that they loved the diversity of the borough, with an array of different cultures living harmoniously in the area. They also said that they liked being so close to Wembley Stadium and Wembley Arena as they were able to enjoy some of the exciting major events which took place there. CM spoke about the negative aspects of the borough and felt that unfortunately young people could find themselves in troublesome situations quite frequently, and that this stemmed from an apparent tension between young people, particularly from certain ethnic backgrounds, and the local police in the area. Gail Tolley stated that the Children and Young People's Department at the Council liaised with Senior Police Officers in the area and suggested some officers be invited to a future CIA meeting in order to resolve some of the concerns raised.

Members also asked CM's opinion on artistic elements, such as spoken word and drama pieces, of the 'Take Care' event. CM said that they felt that these pieces had made the issues easier to understand and definitely more enjoyable. CM said that they would assess if any other CIA representatives would be interested in creating a film or drama piece about their own perspectives and some point in the future.

Members asked PE to outline what Brent's offer to young people was and what their opinion would be if Brent took a decision to exempt young people from paying council tax in the future. PE described Brent's proposed local offer, and mentioned that it centred on things that the Council could provide to support Care Leavers such as clothes, equipment or holiday money. PE said that they felt a council tax exemption for Care Leavers would be a fantastic idea, and hoped that this policy would be adopted.

It was **RESOLVED** that the updates from the CIA representatives be noted.

7. Presentation on Health Assessments for Looked after Children

Jacinth Jeffers (General Manager, Children's Services – Brent, London North West Healthcare NHS Trust) introduced the presentation and stated that it would initially focus on three different case studies of Looked After Children (LAC) before providing an overview of the year ahead for Brent LAC and Care Leavers. She noted that the 2016-2017 LAC Annual Health Report was in the process of being ratified internally before it would be circulated more widely to relevant stakeholders.

Esther Powers (LAC Specialist Nurse) began and provided detail on the first case study which focused on a looked after child known as "Jane" who was under five years old. She gave a 'snapshot' of the case and explained that Jane was 11 months old having been removed from her parent's care at birth, and that she was now on her third placement with a prospective adopter. Members heard that, although Jane was placed outside of the borough, the health assessment team had travelled to see her in order to provide a holistic assessment which not only assessed typical health elements such as height and weight, but emotional wellbeing and attachment to her new carer too. She explained the subsequent process for drawing up a health plan and how the child's GP, school nurse, health

visitor and other relevant parties would be involved. She noted that the final report and health plan would be forwarded to the Council's social care service and that the child would have access to a copy of the plan.

Esther Powers moved onto the second case study of a boy known as "Joe" who was over five years old, and was now on his fifth placement having been removed from his parent's care at age six. She spoke about the health assessment which had highlighted that Joe was limited in his diet, and only ate one type of food at one time. Members heard that the health assessment team worked with Joe's GP, a dietician and his foster carer in order to understand and address the issue to allow Joe to move forward to a more normal nutritional experience. She also explained the use of a strengths and difficulties questionnaire which assisted the creation of a health plan for Joe.

The Committee heard about the final case study which focused on an unaccompanied asylum seeking child (UASC) known as "John" who was over five years old and on his first placement of care in the UK. Esther Powers explained that UASC tended to be over five years old and often required specific support such as access to English Language courses or services. She outlined John's sexuality had caused care placement problems for him in the past and that the health plan which had been drawn aimed to address this to ensure he was well supported and comfortable. Ms Powers concluded and stressed the importance of health plans being followed to improve the young person's experience in care and also explained that children under five years old had health assessments every six months and children over five years old had them annually.

At this point of the meeting, Members were invited to ask questions on the case studies outlined. A Member of the Committee referred to "Jane's" case study and questioned what shape the assessments would take as the child became older. Esther Powers responded and said that the skillset of specialist LAC nurses would continue to be utilised as part of the assessments and that it remained important to monitor the child's development holistically, such as through an evaluation of the communication and bond between the child and their carer. It was also mentioned that consideration of any transfer from fostering to adoption placements were vitally important in the long term.

A Member asked how many UASC had been assessed in the past year and what the process had been for assessments of age across both health and social care settings. Nigel Chapman (the Council's Operational Director of Integration and Improved Outcomes) stated that 68 UASC had approached the borough for support as of 30 September 2017. He outlined that the Council had trained members of staff to undertake age assessments if young people arrived, usually at either Brent Civic Centre or local police stations, without any documentation. He detailed that if the young person was under 18 the Council would consider the best path for their care, and that if the young person was deemed over 18 they would usually be referred to the Home Office. Jacinth Jeffers said that the NHS was mandated to deliver health assessments and deliver care regardless for UASC, and as such age assessments were not a primary concern.

Jacinth Jeffers provided the second part of the presentation which provided an overview of the year ahead for Brent LAC and Care Leavers. She spoke about a focus on internal audit processes in order to drive up quality and timeliness for LAC

and Care Leavers' health assessments the methods to draw upon resources and feedback in order to continuously ensure services had been improved. She ran through some additional priorities for the upcoming year which included: the identification of all LAC teenage pregnancies and development of a health database; linking with the Local Authority Engagement Officer to attend participation meetings with LAC and Care Leavers; develop and implement health pathways for all UASCs; improve methods of sharing information across relevant multi-agency organisations; continue to provide training for foster carers and kinship carers; monitor health outcomes and actions for LAC; continue expanding the work of the outreach service; have the Lead Doctor and Nurse continue to provide training on new CoramBAAF forms, processes and outcomes for LAC to social workers, trainees and nurses; and assess feasibility of rolling out an 'NHS Go' app which provided young people with access to all personal health information and enable them to make and receive appointments regarding their care.

A representative from CIA questioned what the provisions were for LAC with mental health issues. Jacinth Jeffers explained that a referral would be made to the relevant Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) alongside a review of all of the different options available to the child.

Discussions ensued on the potential roll out of the 'NHS Go' app and whether this was deemed more likely to be more efficient and effective than the health passport for LAC. Jacinth Jeffers clarified to a member of the Committee that the app provided generic information on different health needs, and was essentially a supporting signpost application to relevant services. Esther Powers added that the app was designed to be friendlier to young people than the health passport, and was beneficial particularly in allowing young people to book appointments. The CIA representatives present were split in their opinions on the prospective app, and raised that the health passport remained popular. It was also mentioned that the app would require young people to have enough mobile phone data at all times in able to access. It was acknowledged that there needed to be additional dialogue between the NHS and CIA representatives present and it was suggested that a meeting be organised to discuss both the app and health passport at a date in the near future.

It was **RESOLVED** that the presentation be noted.

8. Looked After Children and Offending Behaviour

Nigel Chapman introduced the report which provided an overview of the common themes and considerations of working with LAC within the youth justice system and those known to the Brent Youth Offending Service (YOS). He outlined that the data as of June 2017 had shown that there were 32 LAC young people who were the subject of a youth justice court order and subsequently under YOS supervision. He explained the data within the report which highlighted that the majority of this group tended to be: males; over 16; of black African or Caribbean heritage; not in employment, education or training (NEET); and that violence or drug offences accounted for 50% of the crimes. He emphasised that it was considerably more likely that young people would offend before they entered care, rather than offending whilst in care itself.

Sue Gates (the Council's Head of Early Help) continued and gave the Committee an overview of the four common themes identified by the Youth Justice Board (YJB) into why there was an overrepresentation of LAC with court orders compared to young people with court orders in the general population. The themes included: the complex emotional needs of young people if attachments were not formed early in their care placement; multiple placement breakdown for teenagers leading to greater instability; young people living in areas of high crime and deprivation; and the management of behaviour in residential homes varying which resulted in inconsistent outcomes. She also drew the Committee's attention to the statistics on paragraph 3.6 of the report which highlighted that, within Brent, the number of young people sentenced and in custody was eleven, of which five were LAC.

Onder Beter (the Council's Head of LAC and Permanency Exclusion) stated that the issues raised within the report remained a challenge and required different service areas to work closely together in response. He highlighted the various different operational partnership working arrangements which had been developed between the Brent YOS and social work teams. Members also heard about the different strategic level initiatives which were being carried out to better understand and respond to the challenges of young people caught up in the youth justice system (as detailed within paragraph 4.6 of the report). Mr Beter also spoke about the recent Critical Learning Review (CLR) which had been prepared in February 2017 and analysed a very serious incident of a LAC who had been charged and later convicted of murder. He concluded and re-iterated that joint partnership working was critical to improved outcomes for LAC within the youth justice system.

The Chair welcomed the comprehensive report and invited Members and CIA representatives to ask questions. A Member of the Committee referenced that ten looked after young people who had been in care for more than a year had received a final warning, reprimand or conviction from 2013 to 2016 and questioned whether more could be avoided through earlier intervention. Sue Gates said that the methods to improve early interventions were being assessed, but she also highlighted that by the time of the final warning many of the issues surrounding the young person were already very complex and that the individual may already be too emotionally withdrawn to be receptive to any support aimed at behavioural changes.

(Councillor Conneely joined the meeting at 6.31pm)

A CIA representative questioned what support was available for LAC with emotionally complex problems. Sue Gates said that training had been provided to LAC and YOS staff to enable them to understand emotional trauma in young people and different types of therapeutic approaches to try to prevent any problems from escalating. She also mentioned the mentoring scheme and the work of the Early Help Panel to help to identify the level of support that the young person required.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

9. **Fostering Service Quarterly Report (July 2017 - September 2017)**

Onder Beter introduced the report which provided the Committee with an update on the general management of the Council's in-house fostering service and detail on

how it had worked to achieve good outcomes for children throughout the second quarter of the reporting year.

The Committee heard an overview of the key headlines of the reporting period, the detail of which was contained within the report, this included: a reduction of the overall LAC population; the key statistics of placement activity across the service; the recruitment and assessment activity for the period; the recent work of the Council's Fostering Panel; the training courses offered between July and September; the status of complaints received from fostering households throughout the period; and that the social pedagogue was now in post. Mr Beter also specifically corrected an error under paragraph 6.3 of the report within the original agenda pack and stated that, as of the 30 September 2017, there were 3 assessments in Stage 2 and 7 assessments in Stage 1, and therefore that there had been 10 assessments in total under the 2-stage fostering assessment process.

A Member of the Committee noted the statistic within the report of 60 LAC aged 16 to 18 being placed in semi-independent accommodation, and questioned where this accommodation was located and whether there were any related capacity issues. Nigel Chapman stated that the locations were a mixture of Brent and neighbouring boroughs (such as Harrow, Hounslow and Hillingdon). He said that capacity was not an issue for semi-independent accommodation in the same way it was an issue for access to children's residential accommodation. He also provided assurance about the standard of semi-independent accommodation by noting that the West London Alliance had a framework agreement which provided minimum standards expected of providers, and that Brent placed young people via this framework.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

10. **Adoption Service Six Monthly Report (April 2017 - September 2017)**

Onder Beter provided the Committee with a similar update on the general management of the Council's adoption service and how it had achieved good outcomes for children over the period April 2017 to September 2017.

He stated that the performance data (section 4 of the report) for this period had been particularly pleasing as the two most significant performance indicators had continued to improve. These were explained as being: the time taken from a child entering care to being placed for adoption being reduced by 25%; and the time taken from the local authority having received court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved being reduced by 13%. Onder Beter also outlined that seven children were successfully adopted in the reporting period, which had improved from three children being adopted in the same period last year. He also spoke about how Brent continued to have approved adoptive households waiting for an adoptive placement where the child had not yet been matched. The Committee also heard that there had been additional significant steps taken towards the establishment of a London Regional Adoption Agency. He offered further detail on the expected timeline for this, which was expected to be in operation as a 'hub and spoke' model by March 2019.

A Member of the Committee expressed her surprise that Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) were noted as not being planned to be part of the first stage of the London Regional Adoption Agency and questioned why this was. Nigel Chapman

responded and said that officers would try and ascertain why SGOs were not proposed to be included at an upcoming meeting on the potential regional arrangements. He pointed out that any draft proposals relating to this would still have to adhere to the Council's internal governance processes before being approved by Cabinet.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

11. **Any Other Urgent Business**

There was no other urgent business to transact.

The meeting was declared closed at 6.51 pm

COUNCILLOR MILI PATEL
Chair