



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE
Monday 6 October 2014 at 5.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Thomas (in the Chair) and Councillors Conneely, Hossain and Warren

ALSO PRESENT: Leilani Mensah–Manuel (Chair of Care in Action), Caroline MacGinnis (Vice Chair of Care in Action)

Apologies were received from: Councillor Moher

1. Election of Chair

In the absence of the Chair, nominations were invited for a chair for the meeting. Following a vote, it was RESOLVED:

that Councillor Thomas be elected Chair for this meeting.

2. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 July 2014 were approved as an accurate record.

3. Matters arising

None.

4. Deputations

None.

5. Care Quality Commission report

Isha Coombes (Assistant Director, Out of Hospital Services, Brent Clinical Commissioning Group) summarised the findings of the Review of Health Services for Children Looked After and Safeguarding in the borough that took place between 9 June and 13 June 2014. There had been two inspectors on site and two days' notice had been given. The review had been outcomes focussed and looked at the performance of the CCG (Clinical Commissioning Group) and the NHS in particularly in terms of effectiveness, the experience of children, need identification and collaboration between agencies. Of the highlights, Ms Coombes was pleased to report that governance across CCG and safeguarding children was seen to have improved and there were some positive reviews from service users including young people. She then drew attention to the recommendations of the review and members raised questions on the action plan in place to address concerns.

Ms Coombes advised that the agencies concerned would be sent the final actions to implement, that these would be reviewed quarterly and evidence submitted of actions taken and she cited an example of successful contingency planning. Efforts would be made to ensure it was embedded and filtered down. CCG and the local authority were also meeting monthly to review quality and identify gaps. Ms Coombes acknowledged that it was proving challenging to ensure that initial health assessments for children looked after were carried out within the statutory timescales due to a number of factors, usually child refusal but there had been a significant improvement which had been noted by the inspectors. Members' attention was also drawn to problems in delays in electronic record keeping and Isha Coombes was pleased to report that the CCG had agreed to meet the costs of all records being electronic which was due to be completed within the next two weeks. Isha agreed to give the Looked After Children Council a full opportunity to comment on the final report.

Members, in questioning, commented on the indicator rate for emergency department attendances for children under four which was worse than the England average and also referred to mixed messages about the purpose and effectiveness of MASH (multi-agency safeguarding hub) and lack of clarity over decision making. The Strategic Director of Children and Young People clarified that MASH had different elements and that insofar as this report referred to safeguarding it was accurate. Discussion also took place on the consistency and timeliness of initial health assessments which was acknowledged to be patchy in 2011 however more recent reviews carried out by the children looked after nurses was assessed as being exemplary. Isha Coombes confirmed that the action plan had been produced within the required 20 days for the CQC and would thereafter be monitored and RAG rated and agreed to report back on progress on all recommendations.

Isha Coombes responded to a question on the progress of integration of public health into local authority responsibility and members heard that the CCG was still currently responsible for commissioning but this would mobilise into local health in the future.

RESOLVED:

that items relating to Brent CCG and Ealing Integrated Care Organisation (recommendations 6.1-6.4 in the review report) be reported to the next meeting and quarterly thereafter, with a clear action plan on how to mitigate concerns.

6. Children in Care - questions and answers

Representatives of the Children in Care Council circulated at the meeting revised Looked After Children (LAC) consultation, Brent Pledge forms and complaints and advocacy leaflet. The LAC consultation form was designed to help young people express their feelings. Following comparisons with other boroughs' publications, a new form had been designed which was felt to be more user friendly, with pictures and different age related designs. It was expected that younger children would be given assistance in filling in the form. The revised Brent Pledge form was felt to be more age appropriate with relevant pictures and in a fold out card design that could be easily carried so children could be clear on their rights. The document was currently with the council's Design Team. The complaints and advocacy form had been simplified, updated and made more relevant since last published in 2009.

The committee also heard about the Well-Being Fun Day held on 2 August 2014 attended by young people which had received very positive feedback. It aimed to promote the health and well-being of young people and the Strategic Director, Children and Young People was pleased to report that the LAC nurses had been very involved. Committee members expressed an interest in attending future events. The committee were advised that as a reward for the children, a trip to a 'pick your own' farm had been arranged which had also been enjoyed.

Regarding the LAC website, members heard that this continued to be developed by the council's Communication Team and was hoped to soon be launched. The committee agreed with the view expressed by the LAC that their wishes should be the main driver in the determining the design of the website and to have a design they felt most met their needs.

Members welcomed the proposed changes to the publications which, it was felt, were long overdue and hoped would be implemented.

7. Adoption Annual Report

The report from the Strategic Director of 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 performance of Brent's adoption service for the year 1 April 2013 - 31 March 2014. The report drew upon information supplied to the Department for Education in the adoption scorecard analysis; the annual Ofsted data return and narrative detail from the adoption panel.

Nigel Chapman (Head of Placements) introduced the report and referred to staff restructuring that had taken place over recent years which had resulted in streamlined assessment and adoption teams. He drew members' attention to the 2013-14 Scorecard Performance and was pleased to report that 11 children had been adopted in the last financial year and that timeliness was improving as had the speed of decision making. As at 31 March 2014, there were 12 adoptive household waiting to be matched. Nigel Chapman also referred to changes in the approach to advertising and marketing and support given to the training of prospective adopters including joint arrangements other boroughs. The committee heard of the national changes facing the service and steps being taken to work collaboratively with other boroughs that would help to reduce the time taken to adopt.

Members expressed concern over the possibility of a higher rate of placement breakdown as a direct result of speedier placements and decision making. Questions were also raised on how the authority could be satisfied that the agency was effective and achieving good outcomes. Also, the ease with which potential adopters could be found and that reference to disability should be included.

Nigel Chapman advised that timeliness, speed of decision making were measured and adopters were assessed after six months. He also advised that there had been no adoption breakdowns in the last three years. Gail Tolley added that the adoption scorecard and Ofsted data return were part of assessment criteria reminding that authority was judged to be adequate in 2012. Data available now was stronger and

there was a push to improve standards. Graham Genoni (Operational Director, Social Care) advised that fostering to adopt allowed for continuity in the process.

In response to questions from Care In Action representatives on cross religion/culture adoption and support given to families that adopt children from a different background, Nigel Chapman advised that the provisions of the Children Act 2014 prevented race based adoption and Brent's focus was the needs of the child. Additionally, post adoption services team offered therapy, behavioural management and the life story book was a useful tool.

RESOLVED:

that the contents of Brent Adoption Service Report 2013-2014 be noted as evidence that the management of the adoption service was being monitored in order to promote good outcomes for children, in line with standard 25.6 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards (2014).

8. Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring report - 1 April - 30 June 2014

The committee considered a report which 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 first quarter of this reporting year.

Nigel Chapman made reference to the new staffing arrangements that had been in operation since 1 April 2014 with a Kinship, Fostering and Adoption Assessment Team and on-going support from the Fostering Support Team. Key messages included a significant increase in close to home placements and children brought up in a family setting and efforts were being made to increase the number of foster carers and service development.

Members questioned the council's performance in comparison to national standards and sought clear evidence based statements of effectiveness. Questions were also raised on the reasons behind terminations of approval, the results of foster carers annual reviews.

Nigel Chapman advised that the March 2013 inspection had judged the service to be good with outstanding features and that the data sets would indicate improved performance and an improvement in the number of children placed in house. The social work team was considered to be stable. Reasons for termination included ill health and breach of trust and were the decision of the Fostering Panel. Concerns arising from Annual reviews were reported to the Fostering Panel.

The committee heard that social worker attendance at Fostering Panel where cases were being heard, was not always regular due to work pressures or lack of familiarity with procedure and was assured that this was being addressed. Committee members, while not complacent, were satisfied that systems were in place for concerns to be raised. A view was expressed that the authority could only be satisfied that current information only allowed for assurance to be in line with national minimum standards.

RESOLVED:

that the Fostering Service Quarterly monitoring report (April – June 2014) be noted as evidence that the management of the fostering service was being monitored in order to promote good outcomes for children.

9. Attainment of Looked After Children - September 2014 update

Consideration of this item was deferred to the next meeting when the full data would be available.

10. Rotherham/ Child Sexual Exploitation Briefing

The Strategic Director, Children and Young People referred to recent media coverage of child sexual exploitation following abuse reported to have taken place in Rotherham and took the opportunity to set out what the authority was doing to prevent incidence in the borough and to support LACs.

Graham Genoni (Operational Director, Social Care) advised that training had taken place during the previous week and that one key element was seen to be multi agency tracking. In Brent there was no evidence of systematic abuse however concerns continued over gangs and exploitation, particularly for those in residential care. An audit of all cases had been carried out and he was content with the findings. Some children at risk of being drawn into gangs were being relocated. Foster carers had also attended training. Missing children were seen to be most at risk and every effort made to locate and return them. Visits were also made by social workers and independent review officers.

Representatives of Looked After Children Council suggested the need for mandatory awareness raising in residential homes highlighting potential problems. Graham Genoni advised that the staff working in homes were required to attend training, to talk to the children and work with schools, acknowledging that more could be done. Gail Tolley advised that at a recent Secondary Head Teachers Conference, while acknowledging that they were all locally governed, attention had been drawn to their responsibilities. Schools had been directed to 'Chelsea's Choice' a powerful production highlighting issue of child sexual exploitation, now available across London.

Members questioned how information was shared between other boroughs on gangs that were moving between neighbourhoods and how the problem was addressed to which Graham Genoni responded that information was shared on the number of children on short breaks and tracking was possible.

11. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 7.04 pm

B Thomas
In the Chair

