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MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE Tuesday 3 November 2015 at 5.00 pm

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

Apologies were received from: Councillors Conneely and Ms Shaw

1. **Chair**

In the absence of the Chair, Councillor Thomas was elected to chair the meeting pending her arrival.

2. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 July 2015 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

3. **Matters arising**

The committee were pleased to hear that the Ade Adepitan Short Break Centre had been awarded Outstanding status following an Ofsted inspection. Members asked that their congratulations be extended to the staff and students.

4. **Deputations**

None.

5. **Children in Care - questions and answers**

The Committee heard from Paul Egunjobi (Brent Care In Action) on plans for an end of Summer trip and a half term bowling trip attended by 15 students which had received positive feedback.

Jerome Ben-Kilani (Brent Care In Action) gave feedback on the recent visit by Ofsted inspectors where children had been asked to comment on the borough's care services. Caroline MacGuinness advised that the planned health fun day had been rescheduled for 6 February 2016. The website construction was ongoing and discussions were also taking place on making and maintaining links using social media with children placed outside of the borough.

The committee heard that an approach had been made for CIA to participate in recruitment interviews in November for plans for Park Lane residential home for children across London, including children in care. Gail Tolley expressed support

for the project subject to further checks into background of the scheme and the appropriateness of the young people's involvement. The young people had also attended a black history event which provided an opportunity to present facts and share cultures.

Members raised questions on the frequency of activities throughout the year and heard that the young people were keen to get involved in the development of the website and to try to ensure it met their needs. They reminded the committee that social media was currently the most effective way of getting information across. Lorraine Emmanuel (interim Children in Care Participation Officer) assured that alternative ways using social media, that would ensure confidentiality and safety were being investigated.

6. Chair

During the discussion of the above item, Councillor Moher arrived and took the chair.

7. Fostering Service monitoring report 1 April - 30 June 2015

The committee agreed to discuss this report in conjunction with the following report on the fostering service for the Quarter 1 July – 30 September 2015.

8. Fostering Service monitoring report 1 July - 30 September 2015

Nigel Chapman (Head of Placements) introduced the reports for Quarters 1 and 2 of the Fostering Service which provided information about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it was achieving good outcomes for children. This was in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011). He drew attention to the fostering targets, placements abroad, the number of asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors. The committee heard that efforts were being made to increase the number of foster carers able to take older children. An increasing number and proportion of LAC were also now residing in semi-independent accommodation an increase from 10% - 13% between April-September 2015, reflective of the older age range of young people entering the care system.

The committee heard that overall, the number of available in-house foster carers has reduced however, as of 31 March 2015, Brent had the highest number of fostering households within the West London Alliance sub-region and the highest number of filled fostering places, and also internal fostering placements used at any point during the year 2014-15. On recruitment, while the number of enquiries had increased, it was felt few would result in applications. Work was also taking place to look into reasons why some carers left fostering and also into reasons behind resignations. Nigel Chapman also outlined progress on training in particular the Social Pedagogy course which would continue on a reduced scale. Focus in the future would be on recruitment and ensuring that specialist training was available to foster carers with an interest in developing their role.

Members raised questions why only on average 10% of enquiries developed into formal applications to foster and plans to deal with the increasing number of unaccompanied minors.

Nigel Chapman responded that this was in the main to do with lack of suitable accommodation and insecure tenancies but also some were unable to commit the time and others were found to view fostering solely as a means of income as opposed to a vocation. Staff continued to work with prospective carers who had language issues. The committee heard that unaccompanied minors were a South-East issue primarily Kent and Gail Tolley advised that at its peak, the Kent DCS supported by the National Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) had written to all directors asking for assistance. Meetings were taking place with government ministers. A rota had been established in London and the WLA was working to stimulate the market however semi-independent accommodation would be used where necessary.

In response to a question on the corporate performance targets and effectiveness of monitoring, Nigel Chapman advised that the total numbers were set at the England average however these would be reviewed. Visits took place annually and also monthly in some cases, DBS checks were conducted and carers were reviewed by the Fostering Panel regularly. The child's social worker would also be involved.

Questions were raised regarding Brent's position in fees payments and efforts made to deal with allegations and conflict. Nigel Chapman responded that none of the foster carers leaving the service attributed this to insufficient fees and, while the independent fostering agency paid more, carers frequently left to come to a local authority with which they could identify. Brent currently paid more than the recommended rates and this was increased annually. Regarding allegations and conflict, Nigel Chapman advised that foster carers could contact the independent advice line and training was provided in dealing with allegations and support available. The aim was to deal with conflict in a similar manner to a normal family. On accommodation, the committee heard that efforts were being made to target households with larger houses and where children had left home and council tax rebates were an added incentive.

RESOLVED:

that the contents of the fostering service monitoring reports for 1 April to 30 June and 1 July to 30 September 2015 be noted.

9. Adoption Service report 1 April - 30 September 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 April–30 September 2015.

Nigel Chapman (Head of Placements) in introducing the report drew attention to the performance data and while comparative data was not yet available he was pleased to report on two significant improvements - a 9% improvement in the time taken from a child entering care to being placed for adoption and the 36% improvement in the time taken from court authority to place a child for adoption and match approval. There has been a 52% decrease in new placement orders and the authority had its first Fostering for Adoption arrangement an alternative which would hopefully

increase in number and thereby decrease the time children spent in foster care before moving to permanent families. Adoption support fund. Nigel Chapman referred to families' requests for therapy and four successful applications to the with two further ASF assessments in process. The committee also heard about arrangements for scrutiny and challenge by the Adoption Panel and tracking of timescales. For the future, the recently published Education and Adoption Bill would encourage local authorities to establish regional adoption agencies within two years and so there was significant activity within the London Adoption Board and locally to agree on future direction for adoption services within London.

Gail Tolley added that at meetings of the London Adoption Board and the London Councils, the message from Central Government was that London should take control and decide how the new arrangements would be taken forward. It was anticipated that by April 2017, no local authority would have its own adoption agency. The committee noted that a national adoption register already existed and so it remained to be seen what improvements would be made.

Members heard about the on going activities while children were waiting to be placed for adoption and efforts made to start work as early as possible, in some cases, triple planning. The service focussed on the child's needs while at the same time seeking to broaden prospective adopters' horizons.

RESOLVED:

that the Adoption Service report 1 April – 30 September 2015 be noted.

10. **Independent Reviewing Officer service**

Goitom Mebrahtu (Independent Reviewing Officer Manager) introduced the Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report for 2014/15 as required by statutory regulations. The report provided both quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Services in Brent. He was pleased to report that the service had a stable workforce and that the experience reported by children of their IROs continued to be positive overall. 95.5% of Looked after Reviews took place within the statutory timescales. On inspection the quality of their work was found to be good and they had initiated the escalation of 65 cases in 2014/15. For the coming year, the focus would be on monitoring timescales and implementing Signs of Safety.

In response to members' questions, Gail Tolley expanded on the role of the IRO. Caroline MacGuinness supported the view that the service was a valuable resource, providing a consistent and effective service.

RESOLVED:

that the content of the Independent Review contents of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2014/15 be noted.

11. **Virtual School update**

Ann Holmes (Head of Care Planning and Children) gave a verbal update on the Key Stage 2 and 4 test results for Looked After Children. It was noted that from past

experience good KS2 results rarely were reflected at GCSE level however tracking would continue and the pupil premium used to help bring about improvement.

The committee noted that a full report would be submitted to the next meeting.

12. **Any other urgent business**

No urgent business.

Paul Egunjobi was pleased to report that having passed his Law degree, he would shortly be attending his graduation ceremony. He thanked all those who had participated in his survey which on presentation had been awarded 1st class. He also reported on his recent placement in Belize which had been invaluable.

The meeting closed at 6.55 pm

R MOHER
Chair

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