



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE
Tuesday 16 February 2016 at 5.00 pm

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

Also present: Paul Egunjobi (Brent Care In Action)

Apologies were received from: Councillors Conneely and Ms Shaw and Thomas

1. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 3 November 2015 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

2. Matters arising

None.

3. Deputations

None.

4. Children in Care - questions and answers

PE gave an update of recent activity of Care in Action. He advised of a care leavers' event that took place in December 2015 which was an opportunity for young people to exchange views, positive and negative, and to put forward possible solutions. These were shared with the head of service and senior managers in care planning. While young people acknowledged the support and advice available when leaving care, a concern was a shortage of social worker staff sometimes at crucial times. Arrangements were now in place for back up social workers to be appointed and for new social workers to be met beforehand.

PE also reported back on the celebration of achievement event held in the Civic Centre in March 2016, attended by approximately 100 carers and families, with 158 nominations. The event was very enjoyable and everyone appreciated seeing the young people collecting awards and their performances. The CIA stall had also received a number of applications to join. The committee were advised that the website had finally been completed. The committee were able to view the site at the meeting, noting it was still a work in progress. The link would be widely distributed and available to carers, with an introductory letter from the CIA and feedback would

be invited. The committee paid tribute to the young people for this achievement, their perseverance and also thanked the Web Team for their work.

Work was also taking place on the Brent Pledge and Care Leavers' Charter as a tool to monitor where promises were, and were not, being kept. Initiatives included an online survey for young people, wide distribution through pathway plans, visits and the website. Persistent failure to comply would result in compulsory training delivered by young people. The Strategic Director welcomed the proposal for a launch party which she felt elected members as Corporate Parents should attend. The committee agreed that refresher corporate parenting training sessions should be arranged for the new municipal year.

PE advised that the Junior CIA were working with the Communications and Web Teams on a film project to help foster carer training which the committee agreed was a good idea. The committee also heard about the CIA's involvement in discussions on the outcome of the Children and Young People Participation and Engagement Strategy. Additionally, a Care Consortium hosted by the GLA, met at City Hall the previous week, attended by professionals, care leavers and foster carers also aiming to improve outcomes and was felt to be positive experience. It was next due to meet in April.

The committee paid tribute to the young people and for their work which was inspirational to new members and agreed they should be encouraged and supported.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the CIC report be noted;
- (ii) that consideration be given to the inclusion of a corporate parenting refresher training session in the member Development Programme.

5. Fostering report - 3rd quarter 2015-2016

The report from the Strategic Director of 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 for the third quarter of the reporting year. This was in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).

Nigel Chapman (Head of Placements) outlined activity which was largely unchanged with the exception of the significant increase in the number of unaccompanied minors mainly from Afghanistan, Albania and also from Eritrea. Children were often 'found' and then referred to local authorities to be placed and Brent currently had a high number of referrals and it was difficult to establish what had happened to their families. The Strategic Director stressed that this was a national issue.

The committee heard about the activities during the quarter including recruitment and the efforts being made to increase the number of enquiries to foster which, it was hoped, would lead to an increase in fostering households. A three month project was underway particularly focussing on households from communities

where there was a shortage of carers, for example, White Irish. Nigel Chapman also gave an update on training and advised that an analysis of the impact of the offer would be reported in the final quarter report. The committee noted that the annual foster carers' awards and celebration evening held in December 2015 had been very well received. Nigel Chapman outlined the findings of the Ofsted inspection and the need for greater consistency in assessments and the work carried out to bring about improvements including better out of hours cover, the digital campaign to increase under-represented groups and surveying those who were no longer carers. Findings would be reviewed in training and where necessary, support would be offered.

RESOLVED:

that the Brent Foster Caring Service quarterly monitoring report for 1 October to 31 December be noted as evidence that the management of the fostering service was being monitored and challenged in order to promote good outcomes for children.

6. **Brent Virtual School Annual Report**

Janet Lewis (Virtual School Head) introduced the Brent Virtual School for Looked After Children Annual report 2014/15, the purpose of which was to outline the activity and impact of the Brent Virtual School during the academic year 2014-15. The report included full details of the educational outcomes of Brent looked after children and reflected on the impact of activities and identified areas of future development to achieve improved outcomes for looked after children. Janet Lewis, in a presentation, outlined the main issues and challenges acknowledging that the outcomes were not as good as hoped for but efforts were being made to improve. She was pleased to report that the majority of care leavers were in education and progress was being tracked with 1:1 tuition provided in some cases. Janet also drew attention to the key messages in particular that 40% were in care for a year or less and the importance of improving the quality of PEPs (Personal Education Plans), Key Stage 4 results and support for post 16 year olds.

In response to a question on provision available for asylum seekers, Janet Lewis advised that in most cases they were very keen and recognised the importance of education. She drew attention to the findings in the Rees Report which emphasised the importance of stability and the adverse impact of trauma and low expectations. Early intervention was seen to be key.

In response to a question on the ethnicity of the Brent LAC cohort 2014/15 the committee heard that it was reflective of the ethnic make-up of the borough and Janet Lewis referred to the underlying issues that often brought children into care such as poverty, housing and mental health problems.

The committee heard from CIA representatives that support was available for students from 6th form for three years, in the form of bursaries and assistance to buy books and equipment. The committee also noted that the number of LAC exclusions had increased and it was acknowledged that some teachers would benefit from additional training to understand the needs and challenges of LAC. The committee agreed that governing bodies, who set policy and have oversight, should have a better awareness. Additionally, schools should designate a teacher with responsibility for LAC to spread understanding and raise awareness

particularly in classroom management. It was agreed that governing bodies should be encouraged to consider the Virtual School Annual report.

RESOLVED:

that the Virtual School Annual report be noted.

7. **Presentation on the research report on Education Progress of Looked After Children**

This item was considered under item 6.

8. **Ofsted Report 2015**

Gail Tolley (Strategic Director, Children and Young People) outlined the findings of the recent Ofsted inspection of services for children in need, looked after children and care leavers, which had taken place from 14 September to 8 October 2015 and which had judged Brent's children services to require improvement. She advised members that the Corporate Parenting Committee had not received strong praise as it was felt it could do more (such as a 'you said we did' update) to provide evidence of children in care voices being heard and acted upon by elected members. Gail Tolley advised that an action plan was in preparation.

The Chair commented that much of the support given to Looked After Children was not reported back to this committee and should be, so that members could be aware of all the improvements taking place.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the Ofsted report be noted;
- (ii) that the preparation note prepared by Care In Action be circulated for information and discussion;
- (iii) that the Brent Pledge be put on the agenda for a future meeting.

9. **Recruitment and Expectations of Foster Carers**

The committee noted that this issue was contained as part of the discussion of the Fostering Report, 3rd quarter 2015-16.

10. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 7.08 pm

R MOHER
Chair