



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE
Wednesday 8 February 2017 at 5.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor M Patel (Chair), Councillor and Councillors Conneely, Hossain, Thomas and Warren

Also Present: Councillors McLennan

1. Declarations of interests

No declarations of interest were made.

2. Deputations (if any)

There were no deputations received.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 October 2016 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting subject to the following amendment:

- That after the word 'report' on the first line of the second paragraph for item 6, the following be inserted "except Councillor Warren who found the report boring and unimaginative in comparison with some other Councils".

4. Matters arising (if any)

There were no matters arising.

5. Feedback from Care in Action / Junior Care in Action

Anthony Egunjobi and Hannah Mansaray from Care In Action (CIA) updated the Committee on relevant developments since the previous committee meeting, including attendance at a Foster Carer's Conference, Skills to Foster Training Sessions and Brent Youth Parliament meetings. The CIA Celebration of Achievement Ceremony had been held and had been an enjoyable evening.

Gail Tolley and Nigel Chapman emphasised the importance of the input of young people from CIA. Members thanked the representatives from CIA for their hard work and expressed congratulations for the young peoples' achievements.

6. London Regional Adoption Agency

Nigel Chapman (Operational Director Integration and Improved Service) advised that the Cabinet had considered a report on the creation of a London Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) on 12 December 2016; this report, along with the decisions taken by Cabinet were set out in the papers before the committee. Members were advised that a hub and spoke model was currently being pursued. Funding to progress this model had been provided by the Department for Education in January 2017. It was anticipated that approval for the formal establishment of the London RAA would be obtained by the Summer of 2017 and the RAA would be in place for the start 2018. The committee would be kept up to date with the progress made via the six-monthly Adoption Service reports.

A member noted that the recommendations set out in the Cabinet report did not include reference to a hub and spoke model and questioned why the Cabinet had subsequently referred explicitly to this model in the decisions taken. Members questioned whether the proposed changes were anticipated to bring about improvements to the adoption process. Noting that some London Boroughs would be seeking to join different RAAs, the committee queried the impact of this on Brent. Further queries were raised regarding the powers and controls the council would retain to ensure the London RAA was accountable, subject to appropriate scrutiny and that the high standard of service currently delivered in Brent was maintained..

Gail Tolley advised that details of the hub and spoke model had been contained within the body of the Cabinet report and Cabinet, in referring to the model in the decisions taken, sought to be clear about the path that would be pursued. Nigel Chapman explained that RAAs aimed to achieve economies of scale and streamline the adoption process. The model for the London RAA proposed the creation of a company jointly owned by all participating local authorities and subject to Ofsted regulation. The 'hub' would include administrative, recruitment, marketing, human resources and legal activity. The 'spokes' would be regional offices providing the direct connections with each local authority. The focus of the development work going forward would be to ensure that Brent Council's standard of service was maintained and the children remained the focus of the process. It was noted that due predominantly to existing arrangements, Harrow council had chosen to join a different RAA but it was not considered that this would be particularly detrimental to Brent in view of the large pool of resources that would be available through the London RAA. Addressing concerns regarding accountability, Nigel Chapman confirmed that it would be essential to have a direct connection between each local authority Corporate Parenting Committee and the London RAA.

RESOLVED:

That regular updates on the development of the London Regional Adoption Agency be provided to the committee, with the first of these to be provided at the first meeting of the 2017/18 municipal year.

7. Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report 1st October - 31st December 2016

Nigel Chapman (Operational Director, Integration and Improved Service) introduced to the committee the Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report for the period 1 October 2016 to 31 December 2016. Members' attention was drawn to changes in placement activity and recruitment activity over this period. In particular, the committee heard that the number of children placed with Brent Foster Carers had reduced in quarter 1 to twenty-six per cent, which fell below the corporate performance target of thirty-five per cent. During this time, there had also been a stabilisation of the numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) approaching the borough for support. It was anticipated that the recruitment target for foster carers for 2016/17 would only just fall short of the target of twelve to fifteen, with the number of approvals by March 2017 projected at eleven. Future developments for the service were outlined to members, including the rolling out of social pedagogy training to foster carers and a joint bid with Ealing and Harrow local authorities to the DfE to pursue better collaboration and sharing of services regarding foster carer recruitment.

A member noted that the reference to the delays caused by the slow return of information from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) had become a standing item in the monitoring report and queried what action had been taken to address the issue. An appraisal of the current situation with UASC was requested, to include comment on support offered by schools, collaboration with colleagues in the housing service and whether there was a need for more semi-independent provision. A member highlighted the benefit of liaising with the Adults Safeguarding Board in supporting a young person transitioning to adult services and the potential for learning and sharing lessons regarding the provision of semi-independent and assisted living accommodation. It was questioned to what degree financial considerations contributed to foster carers resigning from Brent and further information was sought regarding the out-of-hours support line for foster carers. Queries were raised regarding missing children and the awareness of the procedures in place for foster carers in such circumstances.

In response, Nigel Chapman advised that the difficulties caused by the DBS delays had been raised via the London Directors of Children Services to senior levels of the Metropolitan Police. Whilst the council had not lost foster carers it had resulted in delays in their approval. Gail Tolley advised that officers would contact the London Safeguarding Board, the membership of which included Senior Metropolitan Police Officers, to seek a resolution to the situation.

Turning to the issue of UASC, Nigel Chapman informed the committee that Brent had the third highest numbers, after Croydon and Hillingdon. As one of eight London boroughs where the number of UASC exceeded 0.1 per cent of the child population, Brent was no longer included in the UK Border Agency rota for accommodating UASC. The national scheme was currently ineffective as it relied on local authorities voluntarily accepting UASC and lobbying was taking place at senior levels to try to address this. Gail Tolley (Strategic Director of Children and Young People) advised that Ofsted had visited during the reporting period and provided very positive feedback on the support for young people with English as a second language. Nigel Chapman advised that collaboration with colleagues in the housing service principally related to preventative action to support people into larger accommodation and

prevent children coming into the care system. The council had a range of providers of semi-independent accommodation for young people and now had a framework agreement with the West London Alliance for commissioning additional provision.

Nigel Chapman advised that a benchmarking exercise was underway to ensure that Brent offered a competitive allowance for foster carers. Further information on the reasons for Foster Carers leaving Brent would be included in the next monitoring report. The council had an emergency duty team of social workers, of which foster carers were aware; however by the start of the new financial year it was anticipated that a support line would be available for foster carers to access non-emergency advice and support. Gail Tolley confirmed that foster carers were made aware of the procedures to follow in an urgent situation and would contact their supervising social worker or the out of hours emergency duty team if they needed to report an incident.

RESOLVED: that the Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report 1st October - 31st December 2016 be noted.

8. Brent Virtual School for Looked After Children - Annual Report 2015/2016

Janet Lewis (Virtual School Head) introduced the Brent Virtual School for Looked After Children Annual report 2015/2016, which outlined the activity and impact of the Brent Virtual School during the academic year 2015/2016. The report included details of the educational outcomes of Brent looked after children, reflected on the impact of activities undertaken and identified areas of future development to achieve improved outcomes for looked after children (LAC). Members' received a presentation which set out the key messages from the report. The committee heard that Key Stage 1 results exceeded the national outcomes for all children in reading, writing and mathematics, whilst the Key Stage 2 results fell three per cent below the national average. The Key Stage 4 results were the best achieved in the last few years with seventeen per cent of the LAC cohort achieving five A-C grades, including English and Mathematics. This was in line with the 2015 national outcomes for LAC. Positive trends were identified for the post-16 cohort in respect of the numbers in education, employment and training. In concluding the presentation, Janet Lewis drew members' attention to the priorities for the Virtual School in 2017, in particular the work to raise awareness in schools of the impact of attachment issues, which would be the focus of the schools' conference.

In the subsequent discussion, the committee questioned the reasons underpinning the increase in fixed term exclusions and sought further details of the support provided by the Virtual School in such cases. Members emphasised the importance of tackling poor attendance and endorsed mentoring by other LAC or care leavers with relevant experience. Further details were sought of the alternative provision available in the borough, the quality checks undertaken by the Virtual School of such provision, and whether any LAC attended 14-16 college provision.

Responding to the queries raised, Janet Lewis advised that the reasons behind fixed term exclusions varied according to the child but generally when LAC/young people acted out it was in a demonstrably visible way. The Virtual School would challenge exclusions and if there was a risk that an exclusion could lead to a child falling behind with their learning, other options would be negotiated such as an onsite exclusion, or reduced timetable. Janet Lewis further advised that schools were also encouraged

to give the Virtual School pre warning with any behavioural difficulties in order to allow early discussions to take place. Attendance issues were not taken lightly but unfortunately it was recognised that it was the one form of control most easily exercised by LAC. It was important to build a relationship with the child and there were many success stories around attendance but sometimes this was more difficult. It was an issue which required all involved in a child's care to address, including foster carers and the schools. The Virtual School did offer a range of mentoring services but it was recognised that peer mentoring could be a very powerful tool and this would be further explored.

Janet Lewis outlined the alternative provision available, noting that the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) was in place for secondary age children, though this mostly accommodated children who were permanently excluded. Smaller alternative provision was available in neighbouring boroughs. It was the responsibility of the school to find, monitor and pay for an alternative provision placement and it was important to ensure schools remained accountable for this. There was some use made of 14-16 college provision but it had been variable in its success. It was important for a child to be able manage their behaviour in what was seen as an adult environment of a college. The Virtual School worked closely with providers and the Inclusions Service to quality assure alternative provision. An online curriculum was provided currently and work was underway to commission an educational resource tailored to the needs of Brent's LAC.

Members commended the robust defence offered by the Virtual School in support of LAC facing exclusion and reiterated the need to ensure that poor attendance was tackled as far as possible.

RESOLVED: that the Brent Virtual School for Looked After Children Annual report 2015/2016 be noted.

9. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 7.01 pm

M Patel
Chair