



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE
Wednesday 19 April 2017 at 5.00 pm

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

Also Present: Councillors Choudhary

Apologies were received from: Councillors Thomas

1. **Apologies for Absence and Substitutions (where applicable)**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Thomas.

2. **Declarations of Interests**

Councillor Conneely declared a personal interest in item 7, 'Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Transformation – what this means for Looked After Children' due to her employment with a local charity which provided mental health services to children in the borough.

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 8 February 2017 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

4. **Matters Arising (if any)**

There were no matters arising.

5. **Deputations (if any)**

None received.

6. **Update from Care in Action Members**

The committee welcomed AD and HM from Care In Action (CIA) and thanked them attending the meeting during the peak of the exam-revision period.

The representatives provided members with an update on relevant developments since the last committee meeting held in February 2017. The committee heard that a survey of Looked After Children (LAC), aged 4 to 18 years old, had been conducted between 27 February and 24 March 2017. The survey explored

wellbeing and sought to improve the experience of children in care by identifying practices that had a positive effect. Coram Voice had co-ordinated the survey and the outcome of the analysis would be shared at a later date.

The meeting was further informed that Members of CIA had been invited to attend a special meeting of the Care Leavers Group who shared their experiences of attending university. As part of a project aimed at raising the aspirations of children in care, the meeting had been attended by Dr Sam Wolfe from Oxford University and Dr Helen Watson from Cambridge University. The group had discussed barriers for LAC in attending university and the type of support that could be provided. Dr Sam Wolfe and Dr Helen Watson had advised that they would seek funding from the Government to develop this work further and would keep CIA updated on progress made.

Thirteen of Brent's Looked After Children had attended a 'chance to ask' event, organised by the council and held at Wembley Stadium. The Panel had included a LAC Nurse, Principal Officer and Team Manager and had been hosted by Goitom Mebrahtu (Team Manager, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance). Brian Grady (Operational Director of Safeguarding Performance and Strategy) had also been in attendance. Questions asked included queries on financial support to attend college or university and preferring to stay with carers rather than move on to semi-independent living.

The committee thanked AD and HM for the update and sought their views on the quality of the survey conducted. HM advised that some of the questions seemed a bit strange or unnecessary.

7. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Transformation - What this means for Looked After Children

Adetola Masha (CAMHS Commissioning Manager, Brent Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)) delivered a detailed presentation to the committee on the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) Transformation and what it meant for Looked After Children (LAC). The committee heard that it was estimated that between three quarters and two thirds of young people with a diagnosable mental illness currently did not access support. Furthermore, LAC had an increased risk of poor wellbeing and this was a risk factor in developing a diagnosable mental illness. The transformation programme currently underway would move CAMHS from a medical model, operating a tiered framework for service delivery, to a socio-economic model (termed Thrive), utilising a multi-agency and communities systems approach. The Thrive model provided opportunities to improve wellbeing, as well as respond to mental illness. The model comprised five needs-based groups; getting advice, getting help, getting more help, getting risk support and thriving. This ranged from early intervention and prevention provided in education or community settings, to specific treatment with Health as the lead provider, to support for those who routinely went into crisis with Social Care as the lead provider.

In the subsequent discussion, the committee sought further qualitative detail on the transformation programme, questioned why there was a large proportion of children who did not access support, and queried whether access to services for LAC was prioritised. Questions were raised regarding the needs of Unaccompanied Asylum

Seeking Children (UASC) and care leavers and confirmation was sought on the timeline for completing the transformation programme.

Responding to the queries raised, Adetola Masha advised that access to CAMHS was prioritised by need. The transformation of CAMHS would ensure that support could be accessed readily in a wider community setting and would be completed by 2020. Janet Lewis (Head of Virtual School) discussed the prevalence of attachment issues amongst LAC and the work of the Virtual School in supporting schools to address these. A Targeted Mental Health Service TaMHS was provided in some of the borough's schools, providing both counselling to pupils and training for the schools to appropriately manage related behaviour issues. TaMHS was well utilised in the support of UASC and the committee heard of the excellent work being undertaken at Newman Catholic College. Nigel Chapman (Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes) explained that a priority pathway for LAC was being developed as part of the response to the government's Futures In Mind proposals and via joint commissioning with the Brent Clinical Commissioning Group. Care Leavers were supported with a pathway plan developed with personal advisers.

8. Looked After Children (LAC) Attainment Data

Janet Lewis (Head of Virtual School) presented an update report regarding Looked After Children (LAC) Attainment Data, which followed the report provided to the committee at its meeting in February 2017. The update provided national attainment data (Statistical First Release) for purposes of comparison, which had not been available previously. It was emphasised that due to the small numbers of LAC eligible to be included in the reported cohorts, Brent's outcomes did not always feature in the 2016 Local Authority Tables.

Summarising the comparative performance, Janet Lewis advised that there was a mixed picture overall with positive outcomes at Key Stage 1 (KS1) and encouraging outcomes at KS2, whilst attainment at KS4 fell below the national average for the new attainment 8 and progress 8 measures brought in 2016. Janet Lewis outlined the challenges involved in supporting older LAC who entered the care of the authority at a later stage. In particular, the challenge was heightened for children no longer in mainstream education following a permanent exclusion or other difficulties. Furthermore, the numbers of children with Education Health and Care Plans were quite high and it had been evidenced that where a child's EHC plan stated they should be educated in mainstream provision, they performed less well when this was not met. Janet Lewis expressed concern at the rise in the number of fixed term exclusions and the length of these, as well levels of absences. It was explained that the Virtual School worked closely with social care to monitor and investigate reasons for absences. In concluding her introduction, Janet Lewis drew the committee's attention to the strategies in place to improve attainment detailed in the report.

During members discussion, the committee requested further information regarding the strategies in place to address attainment including an appraisal of the online literacy resource (Lexia), details of the carer training planned for April 2017 and an update on the PALAC pilot project. A member emphasised the importance of mathematics and financial literacy for LAC and expressed concern at the disparity in attainment between English and Mathematics. Members further queried whether

there was priority access for LAC to Educational Psychologists and sought additional details of the monitoring undertaken of LAC persistent absentees.

Responding to the questions raised, Janet Lewis stated that that an update on the strategies could be provided at the next meeting, though advised that the pilot project was in its early stages. The importance of mathematics was acknowledged and it was noted that schools were now required to include more on financial literacy within their. An Educational Psychologist was attached to the Virtual School and schools were encouraged to provide this as this was their primary responsibility. It was considered that special educational needs of LAC were generally well met, though additional attention was required during their transition to leaving care. Attendance data for LAC was collected every day and a regular report focussing on persistent absentees would be shared with social care to support joint working between the teams to tackle this issue. Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency) confirmed that budgeting was a key element of the support provided to care leavers and young people.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

9. Adoption Service 6-Month Report (October 2016 - March 2017)

Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency) presented the Brent Adoption Service Report for the period 1 October 2016 to 31 March 2017 which provided information on the general management of the adoption service. Members received an overview of Brent's improving performance against the national Adoption Score Card, a breakdown of the numbers of children in the adoption process and details of adopter recruitment. Information was also provided on the number of families receiving post adoption support and the type of support provided, ranging financial support, lifestory work and strategies for managing difficult behaviour. Members heard that the government cap of £5k per child for the adoption support fund had meant that support plans had had to be modified quite significantly. In concluding his presentation Onder Beter explained the practices in place to support continued service improvement, including robust processes to allow early identification of issues, collaborative working amongst social work teams and the permanence tracking mechanism which helped to prevent delays for children.

In the subsequent discussion Councillor Warren expressed disappointment with the report as he felt that parts had not been adequately updated and questioned why reference to joint commissioning with west London councils had been removed. Members queried why two approved adoptive households had been put on hold and sought further details about post-adoption support including complexity of support needed, average costs per child before the government's £5k cap and numbers of adoptive placement breakdown. Clarity was sought regarding the membership of the Adoption Panel and further information requested regarding how ethnicity was considered in identifying matches between prospective adopter and looked after child.

In response, Gail Tolley (Strategic Director of Children and Young People) advised that members' comments would be taken on board for future reports and reminded the committee that Onder Beter had only recently joined the council.

Nigel Chapman (Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes) explained that reference to joint commissioning with West London Councils had been removed from the current report as this had not been renewed due to the impending regionalisation of adoption. Onder Beter explained that the two approved adoptive households had been put on hold at the request of the prospective adopters due to personal reasons. Nigel Chapman further advised that the post adoption support fund made available by the government had previously had no limit and local authorities had therefore provided support packages with high levels of support. There was currently a limited number of providers for post-adoption support and it was hoped that through regionalisation it would be possible to encourage a pool of commissioned providers which would provide services at cost-price. Following the introduction of the cap it had been necessary to manage the expectations of prospective adopters. There was no nationally collected data for adoption breakdowns after the first three years of placement but any incidence of an adoptive placement breakdown would be reported to the committee. National research on adoption undertaken by the University of Bristol had identified that adoptive placements were the most stable when compared with the number of breakdowns in placements made under Special Guardianship Orders or Residential Orders. Onder Beter highlighted that early planning for looked after children and robust matching, including consideration of all the issues that could affect a placement in later years helped to prevent the likelihood of adoptive placement breakdowns. It was confirmed that prospective adopters could request to be considered for children of particular heritage only.

Onder Beter informed the committee that the membership of the Adoption Panel included those with personal experience of adoption, including the adoptive mother of a child.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

Councillor Warren recorded his dissent to the report as he believed that parts of the report lacked credibility.

10. **Fostering Service Quarterly Report (January 2017 - March 2017)**

Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency) introduced the Fostering Service Quarterly report for the period January 2017 to March 2017. Members were provided with an overview of the LAC population including overall numbers and placement types. The decline of the LAC population by 6.2 percent was explained with reasons including LAC turning eighteen years old and leaving care and children being supported back into the care of their parents. The role of the Entry to Care Panel was also outlined. This panel scrutinised the plans of every child proposed to be Looked After to ensure that this was the last option utilised and that where safe to do so children be supported to remain with their families. It was noted that the numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) had stabilised since the last reporting period and a good number of these children had been placed within fostering settings both with Brent Foster Carers and Independent Foster Carers. Members' attention was drawn to the details provided on Foster Carer recruitment and specifically to the slight reduction in initial enquiries received and in conversion rates between enquiry and approval.

Overcrowding was considered to be a particular issue contributing to the later of these.

Onder Beter concluded his introduction to the report by detailing future developments for the service including the recruitment of a Social Pedagogy Development Worker due to join the team in May 2017. The focus of this post would be to support the development of social pedagogical thinking and practice and to undertake direct work with Brent fostering households and Looked after Children. It was hoped that this work would improve placement stability and help children and families cope with a range of social, emotional and behaviour issues.

With reference to a report from Coram Voice analysing the results of the wellbeing survey of Brent's LAC, a member queried whether this work would be used as an ongoing feedback mechanism. A member questioned how the success of the social pedagogy programme would be measured. It was queried whether the stabilisation of the UASC numbers was a result in improvements in the number of offers from other local authorities. The committee sought details of when the Entry to Care Panel had been established and questions were raised in relation to recommendations of the Fostering Panel.

In response, Onder Beter advised that the Coram Voice report was a one-off academic exercise conducted in partnership with London Universities, with each participating local authority receiving a bespoke report at the end of the process. Feedback on this report would be provided once available. The success of the social pedagogy programme would be measured using performance indicators on placement stability, as well as feedback from staff, LAC and Foster Carers and internal quality assurance checks. It was confirmed to the committee that analysis of the impact of the programme would be included in the following year's Annual LAC Report.

Nigel Chapman (Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes) advised that there had been a general reduction in the number of UASC arriving in the country and a slight improvement in the Home Office dispersal system. Some of those young people had also now turned eighteen and were no longer LAC. Members were further informed that the Entry Care Panel had been in place since 1 February 2017, though had existed in a different iteration previously. With reference to a decision by the Fostering Panel to dissent from the recommendation of the social worker, Onder Beter advised that the Panel had on balance of the information provided not agreed with the recommendation and in turn, the Panel's recommendation had been ratified by the Agency Decision Maker.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

11. Children and Social Work Bill Briefing - Improved Outcomes

A report on the implications of the Children and Social Work Bill for Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers was presented to the committee by Nigel Chapman (Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes). Members were reminded that the briefing had been provided in response to a request by the committee at its previous meeting. Members attention was drawn to the Corporate Parenting Principles detailed in the report. Set out in the Bill, which was currently

awaiting Royal Assent, Local Authorities had to have regard to these Principles in respect of Looked After Children and those leaving care in order to establish what it means for the authority as a whole to act as a good parent. If the Bill was passed a briefing session would be held with Members and Young People to discuss how to incorporate the principles in to the Brent LAC pledge.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

12. **Any Other Urgent Business**

None.

The meeting closed at 7pm

Cllr M Patel
Chair