



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE
Thursday 11 December 2014 at 5.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Moher (Chair), Councillors Conneely, Crane (for Hossain) Thomas and Warren

Apologies were received from: Councillor Hossain

1. **Deputations**

None.

2. **Minutes**

RESOLVED:

that approval of the accuracy of the minutes of the previous meeting be deferred until later in the meeting.

(Councillor Warren asked that his dissent from this decision be recorded).

3. **Brent Adoption Service report - 1 April 2014 to 30 September 2014**

Nigel Chapman (Head of Placements) introduced the report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People the purpose of which was to provide information on 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 April 1 2014 to 30 September 2014. Nigel Chapman made reference to questions raised at the previous meeting regarding the service's performance in relation to other local authorities and. he drew attention to tables in the report which compared Brent with national performance figures. On the average times between children entering care and moving in with their prospective adopters and the number of children who wait less than 18 months between entering care and moving in with their prospective adopters, performance was above average and average respectively. Performance on the time taken between court authority to place and matching with an adoptive family would have been average were it not for one case which had skewed the figures. Whilst this one child did adversely effect the overall figures, for the child it was an absolute success as he had been a hard to adopt child who was eventually placed. Data on comparisons with other local authorities would be published in the following month and available at the next meeting.

Members raised questions about whether there had been any noticeable improvement in court turnaround times and decrease in the number of children

without adoption plans. The committee heard that there were more approved prospective adopters than children available and fewer children were being recommended for adoption than was previously the case. The focus was on older children and those with disabilities who were harder to place. Nigel Chapman reported on the first Fostering for Adoption placement, support received from Coram, opportunities to meet and share with other local authorities and the post adoption support fund that would be available during 2015.

RESOLVED:

that the content of the report, which provided evidence that the management of the adoption service was being monitored and challenged in order to promote good outcomes for children, in line with standard 25.6 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards (2014), be noted.

4. **Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report 1 July - 30 September 2014**

The report from the Strategic Director of Children and Young People provided information on 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 second quarter of the reporting year and had as an appendix relevant statistical data from the previous reporting year to enable a comparison to be made against other West London boroughs. In introducing the report, Nigel Chapman (Head of Placements) highlighted the key points which included placement activity, efforts made to increase the number of in-house fostering placements and challenges in placing siblings together. Nigel Chapman advised members of a recent fostering promotion event directed at the Somali community, the Foster Carers Annual Conference earlier in the year which was well attended and the learning and development calendar which reflected a comprehensive training list. Discussions have taken place with a provider of Social Pedagogical training with the aim of improving local placement choice and stability. The service has also been working closely with west London boroughs to improve services jointly and develop a cross West London action plan which is being drafted.

In response to members' enquiries on activities to raise awareness of fostering, Nigel Chapman drew attention to new publicity which had been updated to include pictures, musical references and the website had also been updated and now received an increased number of enquiries. Monitoring arrangements were seen to have improved with only two complaints. Nigel Chapman confirmed that foster carer reviews completed in the period had, on the whole, gone well and offered to provide a more detailed report to a future meeting. He confirmed that foster carers had to have attended training in order to be eligible for enhanced allowances. Members also questioned whether anything further could be done to increase the number of children placed close to home and whether there were any other communities on which promotional attention should be focussed. Nigel Chapman responded that advertisements were placed in EU community press and this was felt to be sufficient for the present given their circumstances as new arrivals. It was hoped that more progress would be made with other communities of longer standing. Joint improvement initiative work was taking place with other boroughs. Nigel Chapman

confirmed that decisions on placements were primarily based on the needs of the child and residential care was unlikely to be the first course of action.

In response to a question on the placement of sibling groups, Nigel Chapman responded that a number of foster carers were approved to look after more than one child. More were needed and efforts were being made to target those areas of the borough that already had larger accommodation. It was confirmed that house extensions were sometimes authorised for adoptive parents but not foster carers.

Members raised questions on the preparation for the transition to independent living and heard that training courses were available and young people's readiness for independence was assessed. Each child would have a suitable plan in place from age 16 which identified what services and support would be put into place to support them to reach independence. This would include support from their social worker, Care in Action, their foster carer or semi-independent provider. Over the last three years the department has worked with Fixed for your Future (a Big Lottery programme) which provided mentoring and advice and support to care leavers.

RESOLVED:

that the Fostering Quarterly report for the period 1 July 2014 to 30 September 2014 be noted.

5. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 6 October 2014 as amended and circulated prior to the meeting be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

(Councillor Warren asked that his dissent from this decision be recorded).

6. Matters arising

None.

7. Care in Action (Children in Care Council) - questions and answers

Caroline MacGinnis and Paul Egunjobi (Care In Action) were present to update members on recent LAC activities and events. Caroline MacGinnis reported back on a Chance To Ask event held on 30 October at Wembley Stadium for young people aged 8 to 22 years which, she felt, had been very successful. Paul Egunjobi advised that Care Leavers group had been established so that older children in care could have their own forum to discuss issues. It would meet on a monthly basis and it was hoped that many care leavers would attend. Caroline MacGinnis gave an update on the APPG meeting she had attended at Westminster Palace and the committee were pleased to hear of the Brent Celebration of Achievement Award ceremony the previous week at which Paul had addressed young people on the importance of opportunities and education.

8. LAC education attainment report

Gail Tolley (Strategic Director, Children and Young People) gave a presentation on the provisional outcomes for 2014 for the Virtual School for Children Looked After. The numbers in care had declined however there were a larger number in the older age ranges and coming into care relatively late. She summarised achievements from Early Years to Key Stage 5 highlighting efforts being made to improve outcomes, personal challenges that led to placement moves which interrupted schooling at critical times, achievements where percentage results had declined and the continuing challenges posed by children who come into care late in their school life or had to move away. The challenges were seen to be to minimise mobility particularly in Year 11, meet special educational needs and needs of pupils with English as an Additional Language. Gail Tolley also outlined the plans to improve performance in 2014/15. Members in discussion, raised questions on how to help children performing below average to catch up, the challenge of SEN and how to improve support to children who have to relocate.

Gail Tolley responded that one of the best ways to help LAC was for them to attend schools judged to be either good or outstanding and where this was not the case, the Strategic Director was advised and decisions taken thereafter on a case by case basis. SEN children needed to have the right placement for their needs. The pupil premium was focused on English and Mathematics but poor emotional well being and disruption could hinder educational achievement. Gail Tolley assured the Committee that a small team of staff in the Virtual School monitored achievement and intervened where necessary, including utilising the pupil premium. Members paid tribute to the significant increase in the number of LAC in Further Education now one in six, compared to a few years ago.

Caroline MacGinnis (Care In Action) questioned whether children aged 0 to four were receiving the right levels of support to avoid them being disadvantaged early in their school life. The Strategic Director, Children and Young People referred to the support given to LAC in the EYFS; 80% of the 3-4 year olds had placements that were either good or outstanding. Children would also have a personal education plan when they come to school which was reviewed.

Ann Holmes (Head of Care Planning and Children in Care) confirmed that the Fixed for your Future programme was due to end and the Virtual School would support those LAC not in education, employment or training.

9. Care Quality Commission report; Review of Health Services for Children Looked After and Safeguarding

Kate Tuohy, (Designated LAC Nurse, Brent Clinical Commissioning Group) presented the report which gave an progress update on recommendations made by the Care Quality Commission as requested at the last meeting. She drew members attention to the Action Plan and was pleased to note that most of the actions had been RAG rated green. Electronic record keeping was now underway.

In discussion, reference was made to the 2011 inspection where the assessment had been poor. The committee was pleased to hear that, in contrast, there had been no breach reports issued in the last few months. The committee questioned the decision to exempt young people in youth offending or similar institutions from having health assessments by the CLA Health Team in Brent and heard that access was difficult and facilities to see them considered inadequate. They would

receive an assessment from the institution and Gail Tolley assured that the council's role was to ensure that work with health colleagues continued.

10. **Development of Forward Plan**

The committee agreed that the Strategic Director, Children and Young People discuss the forward plan with the Chair and report back.

11. **Any other urgent business**

The Strategic Director Children and Families undertook to investigate the backdating of setting up home allowances due to be paid to young people.

The meeting closed at 7.10 pm

R MOHER
Chair