



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

Wednesday 25 July 2018 at 5.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor M Patel (Chair), Councillor Conneely (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Gbajumo, Kansagra and Thakkar

Also Present: Councillor McLennan (Deputy Leader)

1. **Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members**

None.

2. **Declarations of interests**

None.

3. **Deputations**

None.

4. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED:

The minutes of the last meeting held on 26 April 2018 be approved as an accurate record.

5. **Matters arising**

None.

6. **Corporate Parenting Committee Induction: Role and Responsibilities**

Gail Tolley (Strategic Director, Children and Young People and Statutory DCS) introduced the report. She set out the legal framework governing Looked after Children (LAC) and the inspection framework for Local Authority Children's Services. She explained that LAC were children and young people under the age of 18 and being looked after by the Local Authority and that Care Leavers were LAC for at least 13 weeks from age 14 onwards. Members were advised that the quality of Children and Families work was inspected by Ofsted and covered wide areas including the following; impact of leaders on social work, the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection including children in care and care leavers and the overall effectiveness of the service. Members were pleased to note the highlights of the Ofsted inspection in May 2018 which graded the service areas good and outstanding. Gail Tolley referenced Brent's pledge to LAC and Care Leavers which was written in conjunction with Care in Action and endorsed by the Lead Member. The pledge was constantly being monitored to ensure that the Authority was keeping to its promises as a corporate parent.

Mr Nigel Chapman (Operational Director, Integration & Improved Outcomes, Children & Young People) advised that the 7 principles of corporate parenting as required by Children and Social Work Act 2017 applied to the whole Council. These placed a duty on all Councillors, Council staff and partner agencies to take on the role of corporate parent of LAC by the local authority and to take a keen interest in their wellbeing and development as any good parent would. It was noted that governance arrangements in Brent involved weekly meeting between Lead Member, Strategic & Operational Directors, Cross-party Corporate Parenting Committee, chaired by the Lead Member that met 5 times a year with additional elected Members on Adoption and Fostering panels.

Mr Chapman informed the Committee that as at March 2018 there were 317 LAC of which 61.5% were male with 16-17 year olds being the largest group (39.4%). He continued that Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) numbers remained high and made up 21% of the LAC population. This cohort would, in turn, impact on the care leaver numbers very soon as the majority were aged 16 and 17 years old. He continued that the service currently supported 323 care leavers with each care leaver allocated a support worker (Personal Advisor) so as to maintain regular contact with them throughout the three year period up until their 21st birthday. In addition, there was a national requirement to report on young people's progress on education, employment, training status and the suitability of their accommodation within four months of their 19th, 20th and 21st birthdays. The national requirement was enhanced with Brent's 'Local Offer' for care leavers (published April 2018) which offered support to those of age 25.

Members heard that with 65% of Brent's LAC were placed in foster care with the majority of other children placed in semi-independent and residential placements, the Council was adhering to its sufficiency duty. Mr Chapman clarified the options for permanency which included adoption, special guardianship, long term fostering and child arrangement order all of which were planned to ensure the children had a secure, stable and loving family to support them. He referenced the role of Virtual School and added that young people who had been in longer term care did better than those who had not and that changes in placement, school changes and school absences detrimentally affected the educational attainment of those children. Mr Chapman continued that all LAC had initial assessment on admission to care which was followed by annual health assessments and 6 monthly dental health monitoring.

The Care in Action (CIA) members then introduced an activity involving all members and officers at the meeting. They divided us into groups and each individual was asked to identify an occasion where a promise had not been kept and explain how they felt. CIA then reflected on the importance of keeping the promises in the Pledge and Charter to LAC and Care Leavers. This activity was well received by all Members and officers.

Gail Tolley added that in order to sustain Ofsted 'Outstanding' judgement in 3 years (2021 ILACS), regular and timely attendance at the Corporate Parenting Committee with a clear moral purpose as well as a legal responsibility was essential. In addition the needs of LAC and care leavers must be prioritised and using of collective resources, to fight for their best interests and make a difference for children in care and care leavers.

RESOLVED:

That the report on Corporate Parenting roles and responsibilities be noted.

7. Update from Care In Action Members

Representatives from Care in Action provided a detailed update on the activities of the group since the previous meeting of the Committee.

JM informed the Committee that, established in 2007, the main purpose of Junior Care in Action (JCIA), Care in Action (CIA) and Care Leavers In Action (CLIA) was to advocate on behalf of children and young people in Brent. Moreover it allowed children and young people to be part of key decision making that takes place. JM added that CIA, JCIA and CLIA continued to ensure that all young people can participate and express their views and scrutinise Children Services for service improvement. In this way, CIA helped to promote high aspirations amongst young people in care which may not be provided otherwise.

HS updated the Committee that the CIA members had worked on creating the Brent Pledge and Care Leavers' Charter as well as being involved in the recruitment and selection of senior managers and staff training. Members were also informed that CIA had worked with a service manager to develop the Local Offer for care leavers and supported the commissioning of semi-independent accommodation contracts to make sure that they were suited to the needs of young people. Members were impressed to learn that one member of CIA had been made the Deputy Chair of the London Children in Care Council, a bigger version of the local group.

BJ outlined a prom style event that CLIA members organised to celebrate the achievements of Care Leavers. Members heard that CLIA members solely arranged the colour scheme, designed the invites and chose the food, making the event a successful one, in particular, the opportunity to meet other care leavers.

SH explained that in March 2018, some members of CIA and some children who had been adopted participated in an event called Voice in a Million concerts that took place in the Wembley SSE Arena, with rehearsals in Thorpe in Surrey. The purpose of the event was to raise awareness about children in care who could be adopted. This was shown through songs such as "Help a child belong", "I want a mum" and a few other songs. It was noteworthy that the event not only helped SH and others who participated to achieve and accomplish her goals, but it also helped to build self-confidence.

RESOLVED:

That the update from Care in Action members be noted.

8. Annual Corporate Parenting Report 2017/18

Mr Nigel Chapman (Operational Director, Integration & Improved Outcomes, Children & Young People) gave a profile of Brent's looked after children and care leavers during 2017-2018. He reported on annual activity, highlighting strengths and areas for development in supporting looked after children (LAC) and care

leavers in Brent. Members noted that not only had the delivery of both the Adoption and Fostering Services been monitored by Committee members, statutory adoption service reports including the Adoption Panel activity had been scrutinised on a 6-monthly basis. He drew members' attention to participation of children and young people, and care leavers and added that all LAC and care leavers were visited regularly at their placements or homes and their wishes, feelings and views clearly recorded on their electronic case files.

He then detailed the profiles of LAC in Brent. As of 31st March 2018 Brent had 318 children and young people looked after, which represented 42 LAC per 10,000 head of child population against the rate for England of 62 per 10,000 head of child population. There had been a reduction in number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) - 18 fewer UASC in 2017/18 compared to 2016/17. Brent's UASC numbers have gradually decreased due to the number of new arrivals exceeded by those turning 18, as well as improvements to the government's national dispersal system. Despite lower number of UASC, Brent's overall number of children in care remained consistent compared to the previous year. Brent Children and Young People's Services continued to undertake effective prevention work, using Brent's Practice Framework including Signs of Safety to support children to remain within their families when it was safe to do so. The gender of the LAC population consists of 63% male and 37% female.

He continued that whilst there had been a reduction in number of LAC from White UK and Asian backgrounds, there had been a slight increase of children who were Black or Black British, though the figures were comparable with data from statistical neighbours. Members heard that although some improvement had been achieved around placement stability, this area remained a high priority for this reporting year.

Mr Chapman then reported on the statutory duty on the Council to undertake health checks including dental and immunisations for LAC who had been in care for more than 12 months. A slight reduction on the previous year's health assessment position was reported which Mr Chapman added would be a focus of attention of the Service.

Missing from care was known to increase the vulnerability of LAC and in the year ending 31st March 2018, 75 LAC were reported to be missing from their placements (120 in the previous year). This difference was partly related to Brent's sharpened approach in the recording of missing activity and also effective work undertaken with vulnerable adolescents both strategically and operationally using a contextual safeguarding approach which focused on understanding and responding to young people's experiences of significant harm in a range of social contexts such as friendships and peer relationships.

He referenced the work of Brent's multi-agency Vulnerable Adolescents' Panel that had a strategic overview of different forms of vulnerability including children missing from home or care. The Panel also ensured that the needs of vulnerable adolescents were understood at a strategic level in order to develop and improve services through an action plan. Research showed that children missing from care were at further risk of exploitation and risks experienced by young people.

The Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation Panel (MASE Panel) was a multi-agency forum which was established to ensure robust multi-agency plans were in place for

the protection of children who were at high risk of sexual exploitation. This included looked after children and young people.

The educational outcomes for looked after children for the academic year 2017/18 would not be available until January 2019. The data presented in this report refers to Brent Virtual School's Annual Report 2016/17 which was discussed at the Corporate Parenting Committee on 26th April 2018. He then highlighted the annual report from the Brent Virtual School.

In welcoming the annual report, members questioned the commitment of the Police on the MASE Panel and enquired as to what further resources would be required, going forward, in order to address the wider ramifications of the Panel's work. Mr Chapman responded that the challenges arose from greater demand and that under the new model involving Barnet, Brent and Harrow, there had been no impact on the Police's commitment to the work of the Panel.

RESOLVED:

That the annual corporate parenting report 2017/18 be noted.

9. Fostering Service Quarterly Report (April 2018 - June 2018)

Ms Roisin Hegarty (Service Manager) introduced the quarterly report ending June 2018. The report provided information to the Committee 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). She set out the vision for fostering service and the merits of the current staffing arrangements and added that the service aimed to recruit and retain more foster carers in order to increase achieve a positive impact on outcomes for children and young people. This was being done via the creation of stronger relationships with social work teams through smaller team structures with a greater focus on staff learning and development.

She then referenced the figures for corporate placement performance targets for 2017/18 and drew members' attention to the graph in the report that showed placements as of 30/06/2018. It was noted that 80 children were placed with Brent foster carers, compared to 92 children as at 31st March 2018 (representing 25.6% of total looked after children) and 85 children were placed with IFAs, same as previous quarter (Jan – Mar 2018). This is 27.2% of the total looked after children population.

Members heard that recruitment and assessment produced 34 contacts for further information and 25 enquiries expressing serious interest in becoming foster carers. Of these, 10 possible referrals were identified and of those applicants, 7 people wished to continue the process and be visited by social workers. As of the end of Q1, there were 2 formal assessments in process – one in stage 1 and the other in stage 2. The target for the service was to recruit 5 net fostering placements within the reporting year once carer resignations or termination of approval were taken into account.

She reported on the training and support for carers for which the Fostering Development Co-ordinator had received positive feedback from the carers. She

also reported on monitoring, reviews, allegations and complaints. It was noted that all scheduled reviews had now been completed with one allegation made about a foster carer currently being investigated.

In response to members' questions, the Service Manager stated that although the absence of a member of staff which caused some of the reviews to be deferred did cause a strain, the situation was efficiently resolved.

RESOLVED:

That the Fostering Service quarterly report for the period ending June 2018 be noted.

10. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 6.00 pm

COUNCILLOR MILI PATEL
Chair