



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE
Tuesday 30 October 2018 at 5.00 pm

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

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

None

2. **Declarations of interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

3. **Deputations (if any)**

None.

4. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 July 2018 be agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

5. **Matters arising (if any)**

There were no matters arising.

6. **Update from Care In Action Representatives**

JBK advised that a Junior Care in Action meeting had been held in October and this had been greatly enjoyed by the children. The children had been able to take part in a range of activities including baking, arts and crafts and board games. JBK advised that he had played basketball and football with the Junior Care in Action members. LM (Vice Chair, CLIA) added that the annual Summer Fun Day held in August had also been successful event, with 33 children and young people attending, alongside foster carers, Brent CYP staff and the Corporate Parenting Committee Chair, Councillor Patel (Lead Member for Children's Safeguarding, Early Help and Social Care).

HS (Chair of Care Leavers in Action (CLIA)) advised that she was part of the London Children in Care Council, and was currently working on a social action project with this group to raise awareness of three key issues: education, accommodation, and money management. Working with a team of colleagues, HS, advised that she was involved in running focus groups across the London boroughs and had recently held sessions in Bexley and Greenwich. HM added that a questionnaire was being devised regarding the Brent Pledge and Care Leavers' Charter. It was intended that this would be sent out to all Brent children and young

people in care and care leavers via social workers, key workers and foster carers. It was anticipated that the survey would be completed by the end of January 2019.

LM informed members that CIA had been considering how to reach more children in care and help them to feel part of the group, even if they were unable to attend meetings. A quarterly newsletter had been proposed, This idea would be explored further and an update would be provided to the committee in due course. JBK stated that he had recently met with young people from the Bromley Children in Care Council (CiCC) to explore how CiCC groups were run, including whether they met with their corporate parents. Bromley CiCC were leading on the project and hoped to survey at least two more CiCCs. The outcome of the surveys would be shared once the project was complete. JBK advised that he had also picked up a few ideas from Bromley CiCC, including how to get help in producing the aforementioned newsletter. JBK explained that he would shortly be joining the Care Leavers in Action group and was keen to support other young people in becoming more involved in the Care in Action group.

7. Enrichment activities for older Looked After Children and Care Leavers - Summer 2018

Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency) introduced the report detailing enrichment activities provided for Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers between June and September 2018. The activities aimed to tackle the challenges of isolation and loneliness experienced by older children in care and care leavers. The enrichment activities supplemented a raft of existing support for care leavers and were intended to help build the young people's confidence and self-esteem.

Onder Beter provided an overview of the enrichment programme which included one-off activities as well as regular structured activities. Members' heard that feedback from the young people taking part in the activities had been very positive. Noting the success of the Care Leavers' Hub which had attracted just under 30 young people to the most recent event, Onder Beter advised that it was hoped that a regular schedule could be put in place for the Hub to support those young people in maintaining their friendships. A WhatsApp group had been set up for the young people to help them keep in touch and it was understood that this was well used. A particularly exciting initiative was the weekly football between care leavers and staff that was now taking place, with a mini tournament planned for 31 October 2018. In concluding his introduction, Onder Beter drew members' attention to a short presentation providing photographs and a video of some of the activities that had been undertaken.

The committee welcomed the provision of the activities described for Brent's Looked After Children and Care Leavers. They subsequently sought further detail from officers regarding the potential to hold the Care Leavers Hub more frequently, noting the value of having such a supportive structure in place. In response, Onder Beter acknowledged that there was a definite appetite amongst the young people for more Hub sessions but explained that the majority of the activities were facilitated by staff volunteering their time. Additional resource was currently being sought to maintain the activities. Gail Tolley (Strategic Director, Children and Young People) noted that the decision regarding resources lay with councillors when determining the council's budget. Comparative data regarding the spend on Care in

Action and Care Leavers evidenced that Brent was a lean service when considered against other boroughs.

Members subsequently sought feedback from the young people in attendance who had taken part in some of the activities. The committee heard that the Tall Ships voyage had been a great experience, with phones banned, dolphins spotted and sailing skills learnt 'on the go' during the week-long trip. The WhatsApp group had also been well received, with care leavers using it to keep in touch and to arrange to meet up.

8. Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: Quarter 2: 1 July to 30 September 2018

Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency) introduced the Brent Fostering Service monitoring report for the period 1 July to 30 September 2018. Members' heard that the number of Brent Looked After Children (LAC) within foster placements was 69 percent, an increase of five percent from the same reporting period of previous year. This was positive as it represented a reduction in the number of young people placed in semi-independent accommodation. Onder Beter further highlighted that the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) had fallen from 81 in September 2016 to 46 in September 2018. This reduction reflected both a more efficient national way of working with UASC and a number of children turning 18 and leaving the care system. In concluding his introduction, Onder Beter drew the committee's attention to the 'new developments' section of the report which included comment on the report 'Foster Care in England', published in February 2018 and the government's response 'Fostering Better Outcomes' published in July 2018. The implications of the reports for Brent had been considered and the current service plan addressed areas for which continued improvement was required in order to respond consistently to each of the ambitions set by the government.

The Chair thanked Onder Beter for his introduction to the report and welcomed three Brent Foster Carers to the meeting. Members' invited the Foster Carers to share their experiences of fostering for Brent and sought particular feedback on the support and training provided. The committee heard that Brent was a good agency to work with and when issues arose, these were resolved with the help of supervising social workers and team managers. The foster carers expressed that the children they cared for were part of their families, a view shared by their birth children, and though there were challenges to be met, it was rewarding and enjoyable. The foster carers spoke on the importance of involving and consulting their birth children and emphasised that they weren't just foster parents but rather they were all a foster family. They highlighted the significance of the relationships for their birth children and the challenges that this could pose. A suggestion was made that it would be helpful for birth children from fostering households to be able to meet other children and young people in the same position as themselves. In response to this proposal, Nigel Chapman confirmed that the Fostering Network had undertaken work on this matter.

Discussing training, the foster carers stated that the training they received was good and always helpful. It was noted that it was not always easy to attend the training as they tended to be held during the day. Nigel Chapman advised that training could be accessed online and it was felt that there were sufficient training

sessions held outside of the usual times. However, it was acknowledged that these arrangements would not be suitable for everyone. Onder Beter further explained that this kind of feedback was essential as it meant that officers could identify particular households where more targeted training support could be provided via the supervising social workers. He further informed members that exit interviews were held for any foster carers leaving the service and these included a particular question on training, the information from which would be used to inform the Fostering Learning and Development service. In response to a query from the committee, Onder Beter advised that it was not possible to offer child care for all foster carers to attend training as this would be too costly, instead the training offer was designed to be flexible and further support could be provided directly via the supervising social workers. Gail Tolley explained the role of a nominated carer and advised that this would be an appropriate source of childcare.

In concluding the discussion, members expressed their thanks to the Brent Foster Carers for the care they provided to the children placed with them.

RESOLVED:

That Brent Foster Carers be invited to attend a further meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee in a year's time and that if appropriate, the invitation be extended to birth children living in a Brent Fostering Household.

9. Children's Commissioner's 2018 Stability Index for Children in Care

Nigel Chapman (Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes) introduced the report on the Children's Commissioner's 2018 Stability Index (SI). The SI was launched in 2017 by the Children's Commissioner as an annual measure of the stability of the lives of children in care. The 2018 SI primarily used the data from 2015/16 and 2016/17 and provided an analysis based on several data measures. The 2018 SI found out that whilst many children in care had stable arrangements, too many experience instability in different aspects of their lives. Some children were reported to experience repeat changes of placements, of school or with social workers. The SI has established that some children were more likely to experience instability, such as those with additional behavioural and emotional needs, those new to care and children in pupil referral units.

Nigel Chapman outlined the findings for Brent from the 2018 SI, noting that these related to three key stability indicators: changes of placement; changes of school; and changes of social worker. With regard to the first of these indicators, Brent had 14 per cent of children who had experienced two or more placements, compared to ten percent nationally. Nigel Chapman advised that this largely resulted from a higher proportion of older children in care in the Brent LAC population and explained that older children in care often exhibited more challenging behaviours. It was emphasised however, that the council was working to reduce this percentage. With regard to the number of changes of school places, Brent had eight percent of children who had experienced a mid-year school move in 2016/17 and four percent with at least one school move in both 2015/16 and 2016/17. The national average for this was ten percent and four percent respectively. This reflected the work of Brent's virtual school, foster carers and social workers in supporting children to remain in their school places, and in particular, to avoid exclusion. In addressing, the number of social worker changes for Brent's children, Nigel Chapman

highlighted that this was not as good as the national average and emphasised that this was an issue for many London Boroughs due to the London labour market and the pay differential between agency and permanent social workers. Brent had made significant improvement to the proportion of agency staff over the last few years and additional measures had recently been approved by the council to offer welcome and retention payments for certain hard to recruit to social worker positions. It was anticipated that this would lead to further improvements by the following year.

The Chair thanked Nigel Chapmen for his introduction to the report.

In the subsequent discussion, the committee sought details of the support offered to LAC to prevent them from being groomed by gangs. Questions were raised regarding the recruitment and retention of social workers. Members welcomed the realignment of CYP social work activity which meant children did not have to transfer to a different team and therefore a different social worker when reaching the age of 13. The committee questioned whether placement breakdowns could be avoided with greater resources. Members sought clarity on whether foster carers were recruited with Brent's particular placement needs in mind and a member of Brent's Care Leavers in Action questioned how Brent ensured that applicants entered into fostering for the right reasons. Questions were raised by Brent Care Leavers regarding additional support being developed for care leavers and how this would be communicated to them. A member asked whether tenancy breakdowns had occurred for any Brent Care Leavers and care leavers expressed that earlier support and information about how to cope living independently would be beneficial.

In response to the issues raised in the discussion, Gail Tolley advised that some young people might enter care due to vulnerability to gang recruitment or involvement in gang activity. In such cases, young people would be placed with carers outside of the area. Risk of gang affiliation was also contributor to placement moves for young people in care. Onder Beter added that specific programmes and support were provided to children according to their individual needs.

With regard to the recruitment and retention of social workers, Nigel Chapman explained that the council was doing a lot of work to continue to improve the proportion of permanent social work staff employed by the council. In addition to the welcome and retention payments previously referred to, the council had implemented a different social work structure which provided a closer relationship between management and social work practice. The new structure also provided better support and progression routes for newly qualified social workers.

Nigel Chapman advised that foster carer recruitment followed a thorough process which took at least six months to complete. Foster carers' approval was reviewed annually by the Fostering Panel. The council also undertook robust commissioning in the use of Independent Fostering Agencies which recruited and reviewed their own foster carers. Nigel Chapman expressed that more could always be done with additional resources and noted as an example that housing was often a limiting factor in being able to foster a child and therefore more fostering households could be created by improving housing opportunities. The council had recently created a rapid response team to provide better out of hours support for parents, with the aim of helping to prevent children needing to enter the care system. This new team

however had been created by redirecting an existing resource and was a reprioritisation of the existing support provided by the council.

Onder Beter addressed Members' questions regarding support for care leavers, noting the introduction of 'staying put arrangements', which allowed young people to remain within their fostering placement after leaving care. Members were informed that regular workshops were held for care leavers on tenancy issues and money management. Gail Tolley emphasised that there had been no tenancy breakdowns for Brent's Care Leavers' in recent years. Onder Beter further advised that additional workshops, facilitated by Public Health, on a range of health issues faced by care leavers including physical health, relationships and substance abuse would shortly be available. A new post had been created in the team to support placement stability. The purpose of the role was to identify placements where additional support may be needed for the carer and young person. Onder Beter highlighted that mental health support for care leavers was lacking nationally and whilst this was an issue being looked at by the government and by CCGs the council was not funded to provide additional support. The council's current provision was therefore resourced via the Virtual School and through grant funds. This provision included projects such as the Element project which aimed to build confidence and self-esteem through the arts and crafts. A further post had been created, staffed via the Brent CCG, to direct the relevant mental health support services for those young people placed out of borough. Gail Tolley added that foster carers played an important role in preparing young people for independence after care and the council would need to identify how it could better support foster carers in this role.

Onder Beter confirmed that along with usual channels of communication, such as via social workers and personal advisors, the care leavers Whats App group could be used to inform care leavers of any new support available. Officers welcomed any additional suggestions from care leavers about the best way to let them know of new forms of support.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contribution to the discussion.

10. **Brent Council Children and Young People Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2017-2018**

The Committee considered the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) for 2017/18, which detailed the contribution of the IRO Service in Brent. Goitom Mebrahtu (Review, Engagement and Participation Manager) drew Members' attention to the summary of key messages for 2017-18 and highlighted the role of the IRO service in supporting improvements made. Members heard that performance in the completion of pathway plans had improved from the previous years; young people felt involved in decision making about their lives; and, 100 per cent of children were spoken with on their own prior to their LAC reviews. Goitom Mebrahtu further noted that social workers and managers were receptive to IRO challenge and there was a good rapport with Children's Guardians. There had been fewer LAC reviews held in this reporting period due to the reduced number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) and there had also been an improvement in the timeliness of LAC reviews from the previous year following the introduction of monthly reporting on this area.

The Chair thanked Goitom Mebrahtu for his introduction to the report and invited questions from the committee. Queries were subsequently raised regarding the completion of transition reports for young people moving to semi-independent provision. Goitom Mebrahtu advised that these should be completed by social workers for each young person in care when they reach seventeen years and three months of age. Nigel Chapman added that the stability of the IRO service enabled many young people in care to have the same IRO throughout, and this was very beneficial. A member of Care Leavers In Action confirmed that it had been great having the same IRO.

11. Brent Adoption Service Report: 1 April - 30 September 2018

Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency) introduced the Brent Adoption Service Report for 1 April 2018 to 30 September 2018, highlighting that there had been continued improvement with regard to the timeliness of adoptions. Members' attention was subsequently drawn to the update on the regionalisation of adoption. The committee heard that an information and engagement session had been held for Lead Members across London and senior leaders in October 2018 to share details of progress made in creating the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) between Brent, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster, Hounslow, Ealing and Hillingdon councils. Currently, a detailed business plan was being developed by a project co-ordinator on behalf of the seven boroughs, with the intention that this would be presented to Brent's Cabinet in January 2019. The new RAA model would be implemented incrementally from April 2019. Gail Tolley reminded the committee that the regionalisation of adoption was a statutory requirement.

The Chair thanked Onder Beter for his introduction to the report.

In the subsequent discussion the committee questioned whether there were any concerns regarding the provision of support for particular families following the cap on financial support available to individual children through the Adoption Support Fund. Nigel Chapman advised that there were no concerns in this area and explained that the council had been very good at getting value out of the available funds. Onder Beter added that work was underway to commission services for post adoption support at a London-wide level which would further ensure best value could be obtained.

12. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 7.00 pm

COUNCILLOR MILI PATEL
Chair