



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

Wednesday 30 October 2019 at 5.00 pm

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

Apologies were received from: Councillors Conneely

1. Exclusion of the Press and Public

RESOLVED that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the duration of the meeting, on the grounds that the attendance of representatives from the council's Children in Care council, necessitated the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 2, Part 1 of Schedule 12A, as amended, of the Act, namely: Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.

2. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Conneely.

3. Declarations of interests

None.

4. Deputations

None received.

5. Minutes of the previous meeting - 24 July 2019

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the last meeting held on 24th July 2019 be approved as an accurate record.

6. Matters arising

None.

7. Update from Care In Action/care Leavers in Action Members

MH reported on "The Big House" a project that involved a 3-day project of young people engaging in different activities and topics including drama, mental health issues using various scenarios. MH added that the Big House enabled her to interact with her social worker and thus built a stronger relationship. She suggested however that such a programme could be built into social workers' training in future.

L, whilst appreciating the Council's assistance with council tax, highlighted the financial pressures care leavers faced, particularly with regards to universal credit which ultimately resulted in rent arrears. She requested the Council to help in any way possible to alleviate their financial plight. CM and AD added the need for mental health support and education emphasising that once care leavers reached 18 years of age, they felt left on their own with little or no support which compounded the problems and challenges they faced.

The Committee thanked the representatives for the updates and asked officers about measures to address the issues highlighted in the updates.

Gail Tolley (Strategic Director CYP) suggested to members to consider inviting NHS representatives to Committee meetings to assess what could be done for care leavers regarding mental health support. In addition, she invited Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency) to provide details of additional funds. Onder Beter outlined that the service had secured the following funding; £55,000 from NCIL. £93,000 to tackle isolation and loneliness. £20,000 to tackle mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Members welcomed the updates provided by officers on measures to assist. Councillor McLennan (Deputy Leader of the Council) and the Chair both declared their deep commitment to ensure that the problems outlined by the care leavers' representatives were addressed.

RESOLVED:

That the updates by the representatives of Care in Action/Care Leavers in Action be noted.

8. Bright Spots Survey with Care Leavers

The report provided information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the Bright Spots "Your life beyond care" survey 2019 and the Council's planned response to the findings. Sonya Kalyniak (Head of Service, Safeguarding & Quality Assurance) in introducing the report, outlined the sample population and key messages of the survey, referencing the statistical data as amplified throughout the report.

Members heard that in Brent, care leavers experienced greater stability of worker than did young people (11-18yrs) and were statistically more likely than care leavers in other LAs to have goals and plans for their future. Furthermore, care leavers in Brent reported a network of significant relationships and compared to the general population, care leavers in Brent were almost as likely to be living in households with internet access. Sonya provided the Committee with the challenges that care leavers felt needed improving. About a third of the sample population were identified as having low well-being (low scores on two or more of the well-being scales) the main factors being high levels of anxiety, disliking one's appearance and/or not having a good friend. About a fifth (19%) of care leavers wanted to know more about their care experience or felt that nobody had explained to them why they had been in care

Compared to peers in the general population, care leavers in Brent scored less favourably across a range of well-being measures, including happiness, life satisfaction and feeling that the things they did in life were worthwhile. She continued that about a third (34%) of the care leavers did not 'always' feel safe in their home and just under a third of the young people were struggling financially.

In response to Members' questions, officers advised that there were discernible factors behind the number of respondents and that the overall picture reflected greater stability among care leavers in Brent. It was also noteworthy that Brent Council had agreed to pay the council tax for all Brent care leavers irrespective of where they lived.

Officers undertook to bring back a report incorporating feedback from care leavers and detailing an action plan to a future meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the feedback from Care Leavers, Outcome of the Bright Spots 'Your life beyond care' survey be noted.

9. Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2018/19

This report provided quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Services in Brent as required by statutory guidance. The report also outlined the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) on quality assuring and improving services for Looked After Children including their feedback. Goitom Mebrahtu (Interim Service Manager Safeguarding and Quality Assurance), in his introduction informed the Committee that the majority of Looked After Children over the age of four (94%) reported that their life was improving as a result of the support provided by their social worker and IRO.

The Interim Service Manager highlighted the summary of key messages from which it was noted that the majority of children and young people benefitted from having the same IRO throughout their care journey and provided a positive feedback about this. 94.5% of reviews were held well within timescales and managed in the way that best responded to the child's needs. IROs fulfilled their challenge function, including escalation when appropriate, ensuring impact for children and evidencing good practice, working closely with Child Protection Advisers to share good practice. Members heard that IROs' knowledge and expertise ensured that they were able to offer appropriate oversight and challenge to inform effective care planning and promote best practice. Social workers and managers also understood the requirement for IRO scrutiny and challenge and, welcome their independent perspective.

He then drew Members' attention to areas for improvement. It was noted that there continued to be some instances when IROs were not consulted prior to a change of a care plan. To address that, Service Managers within Permanency and Care Planning Service had attended the IROs meeting and would continue to monitor compliance. Members heard that social workers' reports and updated care plans were not always available before the review which often impacted on IRO time to

fully prepare for the review. He advised that IROs needed to become more involved in the scrutiny of the health of Looked After Children and incorporate all health assessment recommendations within the review. Members noted that 95% of health assessments were completed within the period. He added that through monitoring and reporting back via monthly meetings, the issues highlighted within the annual report could be addressed.

In the ensuing discussions, Members sought an update on the challenges highlighted in the report since the annual report was completed, referrals for advocacy support and whether the IRO and Safeguarding Team plans in 2019/20 as set out within the report were on track.

In response, Onder Beter informed the Committee that in excess of 95% of the issues highlighted above by the Interim Manager had all been addressed. A care leaver's representative remarked that she had found the IRO service to be helpful. The Interim Manager provided further updates on the advocacy support and added that the profile of the service would be raised and widely advertised in future. In respect of the plans for 2019/20, the Interim Manager advised that these were on track.

In welcoming the report and the updates, Members RESOLVED:
That the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2018/19 be noted.

10. Children's Commissioner's 2019 Stability Index for Children In Care

This report aimed to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee (CPC) about findings of the annual 'Children's Commissioner's 2019 Stability Index' for Children in Care, Brent's response to the findings and a summary of activities undertaken to achieve appropriate stability of care arrangements for looked after children in Brent.

Onder Beter (Head of Service for LAC and Permanency) provided a national summary and focussing on Brent's picture, informed the Committee that the placement stability rate for looked after children in Brent had gradually improved and stabilised over the last 5 years even though it remained higher than statistical neighbours and the England average. Members heard that the placement stability rate in Brent was linked to a number of factors that had an adverse effect on the life journey of children in care: traumatic childhood experiences prior to coming into care; the age of children at the point of entry to care and the multiple complex vulnerabilities in adolescence when they entered care, including child sexual exploitation and gang affiliation. In addition, there were challenges in ensuring a sufficient range and quality of foster care and residential provision for children with the most complex needs.

Mr Beter then outlined the following actions which had been put in place for improvement:

Clinical case consultation for social workers and foster carers of LAC in Brent by the Brent Emotional Well-being Team and a social pedagogue to assist professionals and carers to help young people with complex behavioural and emotional difficulties. Positive feedback about the impact received. He continued that robust processes, scrutinised by senior managers, were in place to ensure procedures were adhered to when a placement change was requested so as to

ensure that all placement requests resulted in a well-planned move involving young people and their carers.

Mr Beter added that a weekly Children's Placement Panel (CPP), chaired and attended by senior managers who provided scrutiny of all placement changes with monitoring and tracking arrangements to ensure that children only move placements when it was in their best interests. Individual placements continued to being monitored by social workers and by Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) as part of LAC Review. Members heard that it was a requirement that children and young people, their parents and carer, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), Brent Virtual School for LAC and other professionals were consulted prior to placement moves. Additionally, the Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes in CYP scrutinises any placement change requests for out of borough placements consistent with the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010

In respect of school changes, Mr Beter stated that children in care in Brent experienced fewer changes of schools compared to their peers nationally and added that over the past 2 years, no LAC of statutory school age had been permanently excluded.

In welcoming the report, Members sought further updates on the department's measures for the recruitment and retention of permanent social workers further to the initiatives agreed by the Council's GP Committee in 2018. The Head of Service outlined the following measures designed to enhance recruitment and retention of permanent social workers;

- a) A comprehensive support package for newly qualified social workers known as the Assessed and Supported Year in Practice (ASYE) programme where newly qualified social workers were supported via more frequent supervision, mentoring, reflection time and protected caseloads
- b) Recently developed career progression pathways for social workers that allows social workers to progress in their career within the local authority rather than seeking these opportunities elsewhere.
- c) Participating in specific programmes to recruit social workers such as 'step up to social work programme' that provides a social work qualification to individuals with a first degree other than social work.
- d) The focus on international recruitment of social work staff in 2019 that resulted in 14 social workers being recruited from southern Africa and India.

RESOLVED

That the report on Children's Commissioner's 2019 Stability Index for Children in Care be noted.

11. Fostering Service Quarterly Report

The purpose of this report was to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it was achieving good outcomes for children for the period from 1st July – 30th September 2019.

Mr Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency) summarised the vision for the service as set out in the 2019-20 service plan, the staffing arrangement and placement activity. Members heard that as at 30th September 2019, there were 61 looked after children in semi-independent accommodation (residential accommodation not subject to Children's Home Regulations), a decrease from 62 and 61 UASC, 3 more than at the end of Q1, 2019 – 20. He continued that during the quarter, 17 cases were heard by the Fostering Panel with all of the recommendations made, ratified by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM). Members noted that the feedback regarding the courses offered as part of the learning and development programme for foster carers continued to be positive and that during the period there were no complaints against any foster carer.

In welcoming the quarterly report, Members RESOLVED:

That the Head of LAC and Permanency invite foster carers to the meeting in February 2020 to provide the Committee with feedback on their experiences.

12. Adoption Six-Monthly Report

This report provided information to the Committee about the general management of the adoption service and how it was achieving good outcomes for children for the period from 1st April – 30th September 2019. Mr Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency) informed the Committee that following the Cabinet's approval to join the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) Adopt London West, this would be the last report to be presented to the Committee on the adoption service for Brent children only.

Members were advised that as Brent would continue to be responsible for children with care plans of adoption, the Agency Decision Maker responsibility would remain with Brent Council. For that reason, this Committee would continue to receive six-monthly reports on adoption activity, which would include information from Adopt London West and Brent CYP. The Manager of Adopt West London would present future reports alongside Brent officers.

Gail Tolley (Strategic Director CYP) added that officers would keep a tight scrutiny on the performance of Adopt London West so as to ensure the good standard achieved by Brent was maintained.

In welcoming the report, Members RESOLVED to note the adoption six monthly report.

13. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 6.40 pm

COUNCILLOR MILI PATEL
Chair