



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE
Wednesday 3 February 2021 at 5.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor M Patel (Chair) (in remote attendance), and Councillors Kansagra (in remote attendance), Conneely (in remote attendance) Gbajumo (in remote attendance) and Thakkar (in remote attendance)

Also Present: Councillor McLennan (in remote attendance)

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

None.

3. Declarations of interests

None.

4. Deputations (if any)

None received.

5. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the last meeting held on 21 October 2020 be approved as an accurate record.

6. Matters arising (if any)

None.

7. Update from Care In Action / Care Leavers in Action Representatives

S (Care Leavers in Action) informed the Committee of the various volunteering projects she was involved in. S was an events planner for the Care Leaver Events Team and there had been a social event on 26 January 2021. S was a champion for the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum. The Committee were invited to the launch event for the care leaver podcast that S had created. Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) had sponsored Care Leavers in Action to undertake an inspection. Along with this Care Leavers in Action had been involved in training for providers of semi-

independent accommodation, and some were taking part in the Brent Youth Independent Advisory Group (IAG) working with the Metropolitan Police to shape the service. S expressed that the Care Leavers in Action Group had a family feeling with no judgement and free space for opinions and voices to be heard.

A (Care Leavers in Action) continued to discuss the sponsored inspection, informing the Committee that they had met with Gail Tolley and Brian Grady (Operational Director Safeguarding Performance and Strategy, Brent Council) to talk about expectations from the inspection and areas to look at in October 2020. The young people had received inspector training and held focus groups and a Care Leaver survey. The group were now looking at the findings and writing a report. A advised it had gone well and they felt they could shape the services Care Leavers received using the information collected. She felt it gave Care Leavers an opportunity to have their voice heard as all Care Leavers had been invited to get involved. Care Leavers had also been invited to take part in a new commissioning project to help shape procurement of services and align with Care Leavers best interests, and A was also involved with the Brent IAG. The IAG was due to meet with Police Officers and Community Officers in February 2021 to have their say and look at next steps.

T (Care in Action) highlighted the Care in Action Christmas session that had taken place in which they were given vouchers to order food and took part in virtual games and did an activity reflecting on 2020.

S (Care in Action) had taken part in the redesign of the stamp and had given lots of feedback during the sessions.

In response to queries from the Committee, Gail Tolley confirmed that the young inspectors report would be presented to the Committee and changes to the framework for semi-independent living would be brought to the Committee.

Onder Beter informed the Committee of an online exhibition that Brent young people had been involved in that was done in such a way that it felt as if the person was in a gallery. This would be shared with the Committee.

The Committee thanked the representatives for the updates and RESOLVED:

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

8. Responding to Health Needs of Looked After Children

The Committee received a presentation from Brigid Offley-Shore (Designated Nurse for LAC, Brent) and Dr Arlene Boroda (Designated Doctor for LAC, Brent) about the ways in which the Brent Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) had responded to the health needs of Looked After Children (LAC). During the presentation, the following key points were highlighted:

- Improved administration processes had facilitated more timely referrals from social workers to health colleagues. New processes had been put in place for out of Borough placements.
- There had been an increase in referrals for initial and review health assessments which the CCG were responding well to.
- Working Groups had been established to look at support for LAC with Long Term Conditions and the CCG were working with Adult Social Services in relation to transitions for those over 16 years old with Long Term Conditions.

- A health resource booklet had been created with input from stakeholders and young people, which would be included in future pathway plans and was available as a paper copy and digital resource.
- An audit had been undertaken of initial health assessments looking at the questionnaires given to parents, carers and young people following initial health assessments over the period 2019 to 2020. The findings showed service users were very satisfied with the service, with the only areas for improvement being the environment of the clinic rooms and choice of appointment times. Those findings had been taken on board over the past year.
- A second audit had been undertaken by Dr Boroda looking at arrangements for UASCs being referred to the Infectious Diseases Team at Northwick Park Hospital, which had resulted in a referral template being created for initial health assessments for UASCs. This template was now available from the Royal College of Paediatric Health and was fully agreed as a standard template across the 8 North West London CCGs. The audit had looked at a sample of initial health assessments covering the period of 2018-2019, who had been referred, what the standards of assessment were, and what was found from the assessments. The findings had been very clear that many UASCs coming into the country did not have vaccination records and this would, as a result, be reported as 'unknown if fully immunised'.
- A follow-up visit following a CQC Ofsted inspection of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) inspection undertaken in May 2017 had concluded that the local area leaders had worked effectively together to tackle the weaknesses identified at the initial assessment.
- LAC health assessments continued to be delivered during the pandemic but as time went on some review health assessments and out of Borough health assessments were conducted over the telephone and virtually as opposed to physical face-to-face assessments. During the pandemic, infection risk assessments for children and young people who required face-to-face health assessments were undertaken and LAC were prioritised. Infection control measures were also introduced with the use of PPE for face-to-face assessments.
- Dr Boroda shared some case studies that demonstrated how the CCG had continued with the service and demonstrated the new ways of working with one example of a face-to-face health assessment and one example of a telephone assessment with an interpreter. During the physical assessment example Dr Boroda had conducted a face-to-face initial health assessment for a baby who had recently been placed with a Foster Carer, in full PPE, and was able to help the Foster Carer register the baby with a GP online. During the telephone assessment Dr Boroda ensured she was as prepared as possible going into the health assessment and made sure to speak to the manager of the placement and social worker to gather as much information as possible for the telephone assessment to help it run smoothly. It appeared that the default position for many services going forward would be using remote platforms which feedback suggested was very user friendly.

Following the presentation the Committee queried whether virtual or telephone health assessments where physical / face-to-face assessments were not possible had the potential to miss signs that a physical assessment would not. The Committee were reminded that the health assessments being discussed were for children who had come

into care and were now in a safe place in care. Dr Boroda explained that for most initial health assessments children and young people were seen face-to-face, in person. If a child had alleged or there was concern of abuse they would be seen either in A&E, a primary care setting or by a community paediatrician and put in a safe place if needed. She added that clinicians were curious and if there was a concern the child would be seen and linked with other services, and across North West London there was a directive that if there was a concern the child would need to be seen face-to-face as soon as possible. She advised it was important to work around the team and what was the safest for the child, carers and health professionals to ensure infection control. Dr Boroda highlighted that, given the COVID-19 guidelines, a decision was necessary and where, for example, teens were placed very far away a virtual assessment would be the interim arrangement for the next steps. Dr Boroda had been redeployed to ensure the staffing was in place to deliver as best a service as possible under the guidelines. The Local Authority had been grateful for the support from Dr Boroda and her team.

Considering the new ways of working as a result of the pandemic, the Committee queried whether there would be subsequent to face-to-face, in person assessments when restrictions were lifted or whether the CCG were satisfied with the assessments done virtually. Dr Boroda advised that for review health assessments done by nursing staff, if there were other health needs of the child they would receive clinical care in addition to support from the Looked After Children's Service and would continue to access their paediatric services. Many services for children stopped face-to-face appointments unless it was a clinical emergency, but a directive had gone out to say face-to-face was a priority for the initial health assessments of Looked After Children. For children out of Borough who had telephone assessments, the CCG would follow up with the local service to do what was necessary, but Dr Boroda noted that a lot of services had now changed to virtual consultations, including primary care, therefore face-to-face now meant via remote platforms rather than in the same room in some circumstances.

The Committee queried whether Mental Health was being assessed with as much importance as physical health during initial health assessments. Dr Boroda advised that the initial health assessments were rigorous and clinicians were mindful of COVID-19, the lack of school and new stresses. The clinicians ensured they had a lot of time to review background information before seeing the child so that questions were not repeated and that they were sensitive, appropriate and accessible for the child. Links with necessary services would take place also. Dr Boroda advised that they had received wonderful support, for example social workers attending assessments, following up, and leaving no stone left unturned to support the emotional wellbeing of the child. She reflected that as some services were stopped as a result of the pandemic they had more time and less pressure meaning more availability which had been beneficial. They had been seeing children in a peaceful environment. Brigid Offley-Shore added that for any Looked After Child there was priority for the treatment required and she had received that assurance at a meeting the previous week. She highlighted that the number of referrals to a clinical psychologist had doubled. She reminded the Committee that Kooth was available online for young people not able to speak to somebody face-to-face.

In relation to the merger of the 8 CCGs in North West London into 1 CCG the Committee queried how confident the representatives were that their service provision would not experience any disruptions. Dr Boroda advised she could give assurance that they would try their best to minimise disruption and replicate the service they were currently delivering from 1 April 2021. She highlighted that a big benefit in Brent was the continuity of committed staff with organisational knowledge and memory. The arrangements for the merger had been transitioning over time and they had strongly resisted any dilution of the safeguarding and LAC Designates in the CCGs, and she noted that Brent was more resourced than other Boroughs for designated staffing. She had advocated for this resource in order to have a good service and things worked well between the CCG and

LAC health provider service and primary care. Local teams were staying as they were. The health provider service would change to a new trust and Dr Boroda advised that it was not within her gift to comment or influence but hoped it would bring positives and more joined up working. She felt that in the bigger context, following the pandemic, the way health services were designed and delivered was changing and they needed to ensure they were part of the design and delivery that embraced the change and new ways of working. The Chair requested that an update on this be presented the following year.

The health booklets had been rolled out and would be reviewed in six months' time. Young people had given input on the booklets including the size of print, colours and pictures. Onder Beter (Head of Looked After Children and Permanency, Brent Council) advised that there was a very good communications strategy in place for the booklets to reach young people. The young people involved had been very helpful and honest with their feedback meaning the booklet had been revised significantly and was a really good example of co-production.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the presentation received from the CCG.
- ii) To receive an update on the impact on the service after the 8 NWL CCGs merged into one.

9. **Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2019/20**

This report provided the Committee with details of the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to quality assuring and improving services for Looked After Children (LAC), as well as feedback from LAC gained through consultation with Care In Action. The Committee heard that Brent had 2 IROs employed by the Local Authority and commissioned the remainder of IROs through an independent agency, which had recently been recommissioned for an additional 4 years and who knew the children extremely well. It was expressed that sometimes the IRO could be the most consistent professional in a Looked After Child's life and they had a wealth of experience and skills. Each year they had between 800-900 reviews, and the LAC department met with IROs on a monthly basis to ensure good flow of information between the Local Authority and IROs. The Strategic Director for Children and Young People, Gail Tolley, attended those meetings on a yearly basis. Midway reviews also took place to ensure progress and acted as a crucial monitoring role. The report presented to Committee was from 2019 to March 2020 and provided reassurance the reviewing service was working well.

The priorities being worked on over the next year included transition planning for LAC with Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND), including proactive reviews of Education, Health and Care Plans and incorporating those into overall pathway planning, and using IROs to find other ways for young people to participate in the Care in Action groups. The IRO wrote a letter at the end of their reviews and was a nice way for children to understand what happened in the review, and this way of working had received good feedback from children and young people.

The Committee queried how the service would address areas for improvement listed in the report. Sonya Kalyniak (Head of Safeguarding & Quality Assurance, Brent Council) advised that part of her role in the service area was to ensure those actions got picked up, and to challenge and support the service. There was a regular meeting to ensure any actions for improvement took place, were monitored and included in forthcoming annual reviews.

In relation to what was being done to help social workers get promoted to IROs, Sonya Kalyniak advised that the IRO role was an important progression role, and anyone who

moved into that role must have been a team manager. There were 2 in-house roles filled by people who had worked within the department for quite a period of time and the other IROs were recruited through the commissioned service and they were actively working on diversity of recruitment within that service.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the content of the report and confirm the Committee were content that Independent Reviewing Officers were providing appropriate challenge to services for LAC.

10. **Fostering Service Quarterly Report, Quarter 3 (October 2020-December 2020)**

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 October 2020 to December 2020.

Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) hoped that the Committee would be pleased to see the increase in the digital profile of Brent fostering and recruitment and marketing. The service had adapted to new ways of working and had also supported Foster Carers with more online training. He highlighted the increase in the uptake of training now that there was a virtual learning offer available and the additional 150 places providing access to online courses detailed in section 7.1.5 of the report, which he expressed was good as access to training was a critical point for how Foster Carers chose which local authority to foster for.

Section 7.2.8 of the report detailed how Brent would celebrate the achievements of Foster Carers, as during the pandemic it had not been possible to do the usual annual awards event. The Lead member and Strategic Director of CYP would be asked to record video messages to Foster Carers and the Council would provide a voucher for each Foster Carer, which they were happy to do as a token of appreciation for Foster Carers. The Committee agreed that the video messages to Foster Carers would be shared at the start of the next meeting.

The Department for Education (DfE) had not agreed to fund the Joint Fostering Project that Brent had been working on with other Local Authorities but section 9.1 of the report detailed how Brent were aiming to take that work forward with one of the Local Authorities stepping back and another stepping up to be involved. The Committee would be kept up to date with future development.

The Committee queried what limitations and challenges the joint fostering project might be faced with now that there was no central government funding for the project. Onder Beter expressed that they were hopeful and there was director level consultation taking place with the 3 local authorities who were committed to a joint piece of work. The scope of the Project may not be at the scale they would have initially hoped but by end of February 2021 they would be clearer on the commitment of the local authorities.

In relation to section 4.2 of the report, the Committee asked about the decrease in young people in fostering placement and whether this was related to older teenagers and the challenge of finding placements for that age group. Onder Beter advised that this was partly due to the needs of the young people and lack of sufficiency around foster placement for teenagers. Onder Beter stated that older children coming into care late were placed in semi-independent provisions either in Brent or the neighbouring Local Authorities, noting that the decrease in placements was not substantial.

There had been a significant increase in placement stability in comparison to the previous year. Placement stability was measured based on the percentage of 3 or more placement moves the child had, and this had reduced from 17.3% to 12.3%. Onder Beter highlighted that considering the profile of children who were mostly older ages this was a good improvement, and Brent had recently increased stability of social workers for children in care. Work continued to improve the outcomes and stability for children.

The Committee queried whether there had been an increase in family breakdowns due to pressure from COVID-19 which had resulted in an increased LAC population. Onder Beter advised that there was currently no evidence to support the hypothesis that this was happening but it continued to be monitored. There had been an increase in the number of referrals, which in turn had increased the number of child protection enquiries and child protection plans, and from September 2020 up until the Committee meeting there had been a slight increase in the number of LAC coming into the care system, but there was no evidence it was due to the impact of COVID-19 on family relationships. Onder Beter stated that the number of Looked After Children was lower compared to the same time last year. Onder Beter advised that Brent had done well to keep the number of children in care at a steady rate and was not anticipating a significant increase for the current year.

The Committee noted the positive news on the uptake of courses by Foster Carers and noted it would be good to keep that under review. The recruitment drive had been well noticed by the Committee and other members, with the Leader passing on thanks to the team. They passed on their praise to the fostering team and felt it was clear that they had used a difficult period to massively expand the digital offer and support to Foster Carers.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the content of the report.

11. **Any other urgent business**

Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) highlighted that the Council had increased the welfare benefits for all LAC and Care Leavers in line with the Government's decision to increase Universal Credit by £20 per week. At the time of the Committee meeting the government had not yet made a decision as to whether they were going to continue with that increase past March 2021 but the Committee would be kept up to date depending on the government position. Councillor McLennan (Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources, Brent Council) added that the issue had been raised at Cabinet and was being taken forward as a London Councils cross party campaign item.

The meeting closed at 6:39 pm

COUNCILLOR MILI PATEL
Chair