



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

Wednesday 28 April 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

- Councillor Thakkar provided apologies for lateness.
- Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council)

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 3 February 2021 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 that Care Leavers in Action had been invited to take part in a piece of research looking into how young people had coped with COVID-19 with particular focus on care leavers. The Care Leavers in Action group had also had a talk about stop and search, and were still involved in the semi-independent provider project and care leaver inspection. The group had returned to a face to face meeting for the first time since COVID-19. There had also been a member of Care in Action attending virtually to tell the group of their experience during COVID-19 and share experiences together. In the March session the group had spoken about mental health and also began looking at the care leavers' offer from the Council, producing a summary document that

was young person friendly. The group of care leaver inspectors were at the final stage of their inspection and had drafted the report. They were also developing training sessions for providers of semi-independent living.

T (Care in Action) highlighted that during the last Care in Action session a social worker came to the session to talk about what to do if a young child ran away from home, they had celebrated International Women's Day, and played get to know each other games. L added that someone from the fostering team had spoken about what made a good foster carer and the feedback the group had given would be fed into training delivered for foster carers.

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. Update on European Union Settlement Scheme for Looked After Children and Care Leavers

Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report, which brought the Committees' attention to activities undertaken to assist looked after children and care leavers with their applications to obtain European Union Settled Status (EUSS) and gave the Committee an opportunity to scrutinise and hold the Council to account regarding their responsibility to support those applications as part of post-Brexit requirements. He highlighted section 2 of the report which provided the national context and reason for the report, and section 3 of the report which detailed the activity of the Council and provided data and reassurance to the Committee around management grip and strategic scrutiny at director level.

In response to queries over what would happen to a person's settled status if they missed the application deadline, the Committee were informed that this had been discussed in a meeting with the Home Office who it was felt had been reticent about what would happen. All authorities were now pushing for all applications to be made by the deadline of 30th June 2021 and there was uncertainty about what the Home Office intention was in relation to those young people and families who may not have made their applications at that point. Onder Beter confirmed that the Council would continue to support those people and had already achieved huge successes with plans for all children and young people, but he highlighted that the issue was very dynamic and new children come into care every week. Very recently the Council had recruited a part time business support officer to ensure there was a single point of contact with capacity to assist children and families which the department were very grateful for.

In relation to how young people were being supported to obtain documents, Onder Beter advised that the Home Office had been supportive and proactive in order to get the matter sorted by the deadline. For example, the Home Office had been more receptive to supporting letters from local authorities as opposed to 2019 when the scheme first started. Many embassies and consulates had improved their support for citizens also. Regarding difficulties obtaining identification documentation, for example due to parents not co-operating, the Committee queried how the Council were responding to the challenge. Onder Beter advised that in those instances the Council would approach the relevant embassy or consulate and make a representation on behalf of the children, however for certain countries, for example Poland, consent was required from both parents for any identification documents to be acquired by the consulate. The Home Office had advised that in those circumstances a paper based application should be made and the Council should try its best to obtain anything that would prove the identity of the child in question. He added that they had been reassured by the Home Office that this circumstance in itself would not prevent or be an obstacle to status being granted, but that they needed to ensure everyone was doing their best to comply with the legislation.

In relation to those who had not made an application, Onder Beter advised that so far the Council had been successful in supporting most care leavers with their applications, but there were 2 young people who did not want any support from the Council. The service were trying to engage with them and encourage them to make applications. The young people had been made aware many times of the consequences and implications of not making an application, but the Council were not able to find out whether or not they had made an application as they had made it clear to the Home Office they did not wish for their information to be shared. As a result the Council would need to report them as young people who may not have made their applications. Nigel Chapman (Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes, Brent Council) added that the Council's responsibility to the care leavers was in their pathway plans, setting out exactly what they were doing, and why, and showing that the Council had gone the extra mile and while it would be the young person's choice the Council needed to put the implications of their decision in front of them regarding how it would affect them long term.

Highlighting section 3.2 of the report, the Committee were pleased to see 10 cases had been positively resolved but queried how long the remaining 4 would wait for their status. The Committee were informed there was no time frame given for a response once a decision had been made but there was confidence these would be resolved prior to the deadline. Those were the children that had recently come into care. The Committee were reminded that if a child had come into care 2 days ago and did not have their EU settled status resolved the Council were required to work with that child to make an application and that could take time, and therefore the situation could become quite complex. He advised that the Council had been given a specific number of a Home Office professional they could contact if there was concern on delays of status.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

9. Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: Quarter 4

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 January – 31st March 2021.

Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) outlined the report, highlighting section 5 which detailed online recruitment activity and an increase in the public interest of fostering, section 7 which detailed the online training and support offer to foster carers and added that there had been positive developments in the collaborative fostering project.

The Committee were pleased that the monthly online foster carer support groups were being viewed more positively following previous feedback that the sessions had sometimes been difficult to attend in person and child care would be a barrier. It was suggested that the Council considered holding these in hybrid format in the future to enable that flexibility. The Committee also asked for the feedback on training to be taken on board that some online sessions felt too long and could be broken up into smaller segments. Onder Beter agreed to take on the feedback.

In relation to the online training sessions, the Committee queried whether those who provided training were able to follow up with attendees after the session, for example with those who may have wanted to raise something they needed to talk about that they had not been able to raise in front of a group. Onder Beter noted that foster carers were provided 1

to 1 support primarily through their supervising social worker, and if anything needed to be picked up that could be done with the social worker and trainers.

Nigel Chapman (Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes, Brent Council) expressed that the importance of hearing from foster carers was key, and that some kinship carers may be invited to the next meeting to talk about their experience of foster caring. In relation to training, the Committee had heard that Care in Action feedback regarding what makes a good foster carer would be fed into training, and Nigel Chapman suggested that it might be useful to include in the next report the difference the feedback had made to how carers heard and listened to young people's experiences as well. The Committee heard that feedback from young people had also been used in the Council's recruitment and marketing of fostering.

The Committee highlighted that section 4.2 of the report detailed a decrease in the number of in-house foster carers, noting that this was the second quarter the Committee had seen a decrease and wanted assurance around this. Onder Beter advised the Committee that, while COVID-19 had impacted recruitment activity, the number of carers recruited to 2020-2021 was similar to the numbers of previous years. There had also been a decrease in the number of looked after children which would impact the data seen as some of those included at the time of reporting would no longer be in foster care.

In relation to the DfE decision to not allocate further funding to the collaborative fostering project in section 9.1, Nigel Chapman advised that the Council had challenged the DfE and asked for feedback for the decision, and while they had not been wholly satisfied with the response had to accept the decision. The team were planning to put forward proposals through funding made available for new and innovative pieces of work.

The Committee would be presented with a report regarding support provided to kinship carers at the next meeting, including a summary of findings of an audit activity reviewing kinship arrangements. The report would include information on the support to those kinship carers who may fall between the gaps, for example those who lived in another borough to where their kinship was arranged. The Committee were invited to email the team with any further points they would like in the future report.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

10. Update on Semi-Independent Provision for Looked After Children and Care Leavers

The purpose of this report was to provide the Corporate Parenting Committee with an update on the quality assurance of semi-independent provision commissioned by the council to accommodate looked after children (LAC) aged 16-18 and care leavers. Shirley Parks (Head of Forward Planning Performance & Partnerships, Brent Council) advised that the report detailed the work done to develop the new quality assurance framework with children and young people at its heart to ensure it responded to their experiences and how they thought it could improve. Shirley Parks also detailed the major consultation the government had done around semi-independent provision, and the fact government were preparing to introduce some national standards and a form of Ofsted quality assurance. The details of this were not specific yet, but the Council had put itself forward to have a conversation with the DfE about those standards. The Committee were advised that this work would remain in place alongside the national framework.

The Committee were grateful to see a report about semi-independent provision quality assurance in co-production with young people. They offered appreciation to those who worked in semi-independent provision and emphasised their expectation that providers needed high calibre experienced staff who understood the experience of young people and should be providing specialised training for those staff to improve their understanding of young people and trauma. Shirley Parks agreed and noted that as part of the process they had spoken to providers for their input into the framework and the key objective was to find providers completely aligned with the Council's aims and develop commissioning around that.

The Committee also felt it was important to consider the role regeneration and housing could play regarding how the Council understood the care leaving population to predict housing need for the future, and for the needs of care leavers to be considered when the Council considered housing projects in the Borough.

The Committee highlighted there were some children and young people placed in Brent by other authorities. Shirley Parks acknowledged that there was not a list of every semi-independent provider in Brent, but one thing the Council could do when they became aware of those providers on local patches was to invite them to the provider forums as the forums were not exclusively for those Brent Council had commissioned. There was an intention to set up a best practice forum and a training forum for all providers, and the invitation would be extended to those providers to help them understand Brent standards.

The Committee were advised that young people had been a really important part of the work to help the Council understand the key issues young people faced and had put things on the table that officers may not have thought about. Shirley Parks acknowledged that there was an action plan to implement the work and it would be reviewed regularly with young people to ensure it was fit for purpose, in the context of any national guidance that came out.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the content of the report.

11. Six-Monthly Adoption Report

The purpose of this report was to provide a briefing to the Corporate Parenting Committee in relation to adoption performance data for 1 October 2020 – 31 March 2021, the progress and activity of Adopt London West, and how good outcomes were being achieved for children. Debbie Gabriel (Adopt London West) drew the Committee's attention to some key points of the report, including performance data in section 5, recruitment data in section 7, feedback received in section 9, and training information in section 10.

The Committee thanked the report authors for the paper and were pleased there was a lot of activity happening such as the choir. They felt it was good to see the training work happening, noting that the trauma informed programme had been expanded and queried whether there were any other types of organisations that might benefit from the training if there were available spaces. Debbie Gabriel advised the Committee that if there were organisations that had an interest then they would be entitled to get in touch regarding the training, and the training was being promoted by school heads and to other organisations, and voluntary adoption agency partners had also been invited.

It was agreed that future reports would have a short section setting out the financial arrangements for the adoption service, including Brent Council's contribution and what Brent Council got in return.

The Committee queried how the adoption support fund worked and how it was apportioned across Boroughs. Debbie Gabriel advised that at the moment the funding was apportioned on a family by family basis rather than allocated across Boroughs, with social workers applying individually for individual families. Adopt London West were grateful for the fund but felt it was very prescriptive with a lot of therapy excluded. The Committee heard that the DfE were currently reviewing the fund for the first time, and Adopt London West were sending a report asking for the DfE to consider widening the brief to allow applications for training, and more leniency in allocating the funding, which might enable Adopt London West to directly commission services that families could refer themselves to.

In relation to the emergency fund, Debbie Gabriel confirmed that had now ceased and Adopt London West had tried its best within the Adopt London Partnership to provide ongoing funding for the “We are Family” service, so all Adopt London Partnerships contributed to that to ensure the webinar programme could continue. At the last partnership Board meeting it had also been agreed that the service would purchase Grandparents Plus membership for kinship carers.

The members of the Committee offered to promote adoption campaigns through their relevant online platforms including facebook, twitter, Instagram and next door. The details of the promotion materials would be emailed to members.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the contents of the report.

12. **Any other urgent business**

Councillor Kansagra advised the Committee that this would be his final Corporate Parenting Committee meeting, and thanked all members and officers. The Committee thanked Councillor Kansagra for his contributions to the Committee.

The meeting closed at 7:00pm

COUNCILLOR MILI PATEL
Chair