



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE
Wednesday 19 January 2022 at 5.00 pm
Held as an online virtual meeting

PRESENT (in a remote capacity): Councillors Conneely, Gbajumo, Maurice and Thakkar

Also Present (in a remote capacity): Councillor McLennan

1. Election of Chair

Councillor Conneely was appointed as Chair for the duration of the meeting.

2. 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.

3. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members

None.

4. Declarations of interests

Councillor Conneely declared a personal interest that she worked for Brent Centre for Young People who worked in partnership with Brent Council.

5. Deputations (if any)

None received.

6. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the last meeting held on 13 October 2021 be approved as an accurate record, subject to formal ratification at the next quorate, in-person meeting.

7. Matters arising (if any)

None.

8. Update from Care in Action and Care Leavers in Action Representatives

A (Care Leavers in Action) advised that she had been involved in the youth inspection project where Care Leavers In Action (CLIA) were able to work alongside other services

and meet senior members within Brent to ask tough questions. A had also been involved in the semi-independent accommodation project and had conducted a visit to a placement in semi-independent accommodation. She had been able to speak with the young person placed there and gather their views and feedback. The aim of the project was to improve the lives of people living in semi-independent accommodation. For the future of CLIA, A hoped to reach out to other Boroughs to see how they worked with their young people in care and wanted to focus on mental health, employment, training, and pathway planning.

C (Care Leavers in Action) had also been involved in the youth inspection. C felt that the work care leavers were doing was being seen and taken on board by senior leaders in Brent. The outcome of the project had been presented by young people to the Strategic Director for Children and Young People and Lead Member for Children's Safeguarding, Early Help and Social Care in Autumn. Subsequent to receiving the report, Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) had chaired an implementation group which included young people, and the next Committee meeting would receive a summary report of the response and actions taken as a result of the inspection. A new project C was working on with CLIA included looking at mental health services in leaving care services, and also using hypothetical scenarios to test PAs.

L (Care Leavers in Action) highlighted that, at the last Care Leavers in Action (CLIA) session, they had a Christmas party, which had been good but not many people attended. CLIA was trying to engage more people to join and encourage people to see how CLIA could support them.

Tanya Williams (Participation and Engagement Lead, Brent Council) spoke on behalf of a member of Care in Action (CIA) who could not attend the meeting. The young person had been attending CIA for 3 years and had enjoyed the Christmas party. The CIA group were working on recruiting more people to join the group through video messages. The CIA member fed back that holding sessions in the Civic Centre was not suitable for all members and the group were looking into other venues to hold sessions. Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) highlighted that she would be interested to hear more about the reasons CIA were looking at venues outside of Brent Civic Centre and was happy to work with children and young people on that. Tanya Williams advised that views were currently quite mixed, but a trial session had been held at a Family Wellbeing Centre the previous day and a further session would be held there in February. Those sessions would then be reviewed to see if it was the right venue.

The Committee asked the young people present about the focus on mental health, which appeared to be top of the agenda for young people. C responded that mental health was an extremely prevalent issue, not just for care leavers but also those in care, foster care, and all the adjoining sectors linked with care. C highlighted that the current mental health facilities that care leavers had access to were sometimes not trusted or there was a lack of staff. C highlighted that over the past 20 years mental health had become a much more vast area and while there were moves in the right direction, he felt mental health services were not completely where they needed to be yet, which was why CLIA wanted to focus attention on that.

In relation to the semi-independent accommodation project, the Committee asked whether care leaver involvement was making a difference to commissioning or placement arrangements. Care leavers advised that from their time in placement to now they had seen a huge improvement. There were things that could be worked on and care leavers were taking the areas young people felt needed more attention and working with the providers and key workers on those areas. Care leavers looked forward to reporting back on the project in the future.

Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) advised that on 12 January 2022 the London Children in Care (CiC) Council held a meeting with a Brent CIA member there as a representative on the London Council. In addition a panel held at the end of the meeting had been successfully facilitated by a Brent Care Leaver. The motto from the meeting from young people across London had been ‘less corporate, more parenting’.

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.

9. **Bright Spots Survey: Your Life Beyond Care 2021**

Sonya Kalyniak (Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, Brent Council) introduced the report, which provided information on the Bright Spots “Your life beyond care” survey 2021 and how the Council planned to respond. She highlighted that there had been a good response rate, with 132 care leavers responding out of a possible 400 at the time. This amounted to a 32% response rate with a good range of experiences, age groups and ethnic backgrounds. In introducing the report, she highlighted the following key points:

- There were high levels of happiness, life satisfaction and feeling worthwhile, and a reduction in the reporting of low wellbeing. There had been 24% of respondents reporting low wellbeing so there was still work to do there but it had improved. Levels of positivity about the future had increased at 46% compared to 35% in 2019 and there was a higher percentage of care leavers knowing who their leaving care worker was.
- Areas for improvement were around young people feeling that they had someone they trusted and people who stuck by them in life. There was a correlation between those who reported lower wellbeing and not having someone to trust. 41% of young people said they did not feel safe where they lived, and 36% felt their accommodation was not right for them. Some respondents wanted to know more about the reasons they had been taken in to care.
- These areas had been focused on in a session, and care leavers had looked at the results in detail and were considering what project they would like to do following the results to support their peers. For example, following the previous survey they had developed a financial guide for care leavers which had been well received.

The Chair thanked Sonya for her introduction and invited comments and questions from those present, with the following raised:

Responding to whether the completion of the survey was incentivised, Sonya Kalyniak advised that there had been a prize draw of 3 prizes, so those who let the service know they had completed it were entered into the draw. She highlighted that the survey was 10 minutes long and designed to be quick and snappy, developed with young people. Details of the prize winners would be circulated to care leavers.

The Committee queried the statistic in section 4.4 of the report which detailed that 30% of care leavers reported high levels of satisfaction, and whether that meant 70% of care leavers did not. Sonya Kalyniak explained that there were also people who reported high levels of satisfaction, but the 30% referred specifically to those reporting ‘very’ high levels of satisfaction.

In relation to some respondents feeling they had nobody they could trust, the Committee queried how the Council might address that in future, and whether the pandemic had impacted those feelings where it might have been difficult to meet and establish a trusting relationship. Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) felt it was an important point to raise. In light of the growing care leaver numbers, the service had been expanded with the addition of another leaving care team which had meant new PAs were required, and he felt it inevitable there would be trust issues at the beginning of those new relationships which took time to build. He felt there was a need to focus on how to provide those opportunities for relationships to grow and be nurtured between new members of staff, PAs and care leavers. He hoped with the easing of restrictions more face to face meetings with larger groups was possible in order to boost relationship building.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

10. Responding to Health Needs of Looked After Children

The Committee received a presentation from Dr Arlene Boroda (Designated Doctor for Safeguarding Children, and Children Looked After – Brent, NWL CCG) and Esther Powers (Designated Nurse for Looked After Children – Brent and Hounslow, NWL CCG) which provided an update on the response to the health needs of looked after children during 2021. The following points were highlighted during the presentation:

- Statutory duties had continued during Covid-19, including Initial Health Assessments, which were conducted face to face, and Review Health Assessments, which had been conducted either face to face or virtually depending on the clinical need and preferences of the person. Infection control measures had been in place.
- All Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) needing screening for infectious disease had been seen or referred.
- Partnership work had continued, and health was very well represented at relevant panels, such as the Entry to Care Panel.
- The Health Provider Team was well resourced in terms of staffing. The transfer of community services had been seamless, and Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust (CLCH) had invested in an additional LAC Nurse to cover out of borough cases. A new specialist mental health LAC nurse had also been appointed by Central and North West London Healthcare NHS Trust (CNWL) to support out of borough placements.
- In relation to care leavers specifically, a health resource booklet had been co-produced with young people and incorporated into Pathway Plans.
- A care leavers' health audit had been completed in 2021 with a sample of 15 care leavers. 33% of the sample had been UASC with no vaccination records. Of the overall audit sample, registration with a dentist and optician, and regular dental and vision checks, were not at 100%, but when compared to other populations they were at similar percentages, and the numbers were not a cause for concern.

- In relation to what had gone well during the reporting period, the following areas were listed: there had been positive progress in the management of timeliness for BAAFs; The Looked After Children (LAC) health admin continued to offer quarterly bitesize training sessions for social workers; a wider professional network was participating in strategy meetings and risk management discussions and; the out of borough CAMHS co-ordinator was providing flexible resource for LAC and care leavers requiring referrals for therapeutic intervention.
- The health service continued to work on areas for improvement, such as waiting times for CAMHS which remained a priority, out of borough care leavers receiving their care leaver's health summary consistently, and timeliness of referrals for initial and review health assessments.
- A new pathway had been designed by NHSE for dental access for LAC due to the difficulty in accessing dental care for young people across Brent.
- In relation to the overall health arrangements in Brent, from 1 April 2021 Brent CCG had been subsumed into the NWL CCG covering all 8 NWL boroughs. The CCG was a part of the quality directorate, and across NWL CCG there was a want to standardise the offer across the 8 boroughs to ensure best practice.
- Dr Boroda provided a case study of how the health service was supporting UASCs. She advised that the CCG were committed to meeting the health needs of UASCs placed in Brent and asked how they were feeling, what their journey had been like, and invited them to use the services on offer. The health service ensured the use of translators where necessary, and offered culturally competent practice.

In considering the presentation, the Committee raised the following points:

The Committee queried the reasons for the difficulties in accessing dental care for looked after children. Esther Powers advised that during the pandemic dental care was difficult to access for everybody, and, even though looked after children were considered priority in Brent to be seen, it had been difficult to get them to be seen face to face for routine care. Dr Arlene Boroda added that NHSE had issued directives around infection control because dental procedures involved access to the oral cavity, which was high risk in relation to the transmission of Covid-19. Many aerosol generated procedures could carry the virus and pose risk to the patient and professional. She highlighted that NWL Designated Safeguarding professionals had raised the alarm that the dental figures would be poor and asked what the government was doing about it, and services were commissioned on the back of that. The safeguarding community continued to argue the cause for services for the population so there were no closed doors for Brent's young people. She added that medical emergencies did continue and community dentists and A&E remained open for those in pain that needed to be addressed.

The Committee asked whether there were any opportunities for funding to be streamed through to LAC health services. Dr Arlene Boroda believed that, if statutory functions were needed, commissioners would have those conversations and do their best to meet the need. She was not aware of any funding restrictions impacting services. One workstream that should be monitored was the increased number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) and she was sure that conversation would be held at the appropriate level.

In relation to how CAMHS waiting lists could be addressed for looked after children, Dr Arlene Boroda advised there was no one size fits all approach. There was an opportunity to work together as a partnership and there were conversations with children and young

people and foster carers which she felt was key. She highlighted that emotional wellbeing and mental health was very complex, and over the past 2 years emotional wellbeing and mental health for young people had been impacted by multiple variables not limited to Covid-19. She felt working together to find and trial solutions to see what worked was important. Dr Boroda felt optimistic that the strategic leaders in Brent would work together in the means they had to focus on this issue.

Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) expressed thanks to Dr Boroda for the presentation and the work she and her team did, which was cited as best practice in London and nationally. Dr Boroda added that the team worked very well as a partnership and had good foster carers and social care professionals.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.

11. London Protocol on Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers

Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report, which provided a brief outline of the London protocol for reducing the unnecessary criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers, which had been announced in March 2021. This followed from the national protocol published three years ago. The summary was set out in section 3 of the report, and the report also detailed Brent's position on current practice to reduce the criminalisation of children in care and care leavers. Onder Beter requested the Committee embraced the principles set out in the protocol in relation to the trauma informed approach taken and the advocacy on behalf of looked after children and care leavers who came into contact with the justice system.

In relation to the Path Finder Programme, Nigel Chapman (Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes, Brent Council) advised that this was a 3-year funded Youth Justice Project aimed at preventing the entry of young people into the criminal justice system through a very early intervention approach. There was one more year of the programme. The Youth Panel had been running for a year, doing a regular podcast with the voices of young people across Brent. There was also counselling and activities provided through the Young Brent Foundation. In total, the project would work with up to 350 young people across the programme, and had worked with 160 so far.

Regarding representation on the programme, Nigel Chapman advised that the criteria was exclusively for young people from Black, Asian or other minority ethnic backgrounds. Through a recent survey of young people using the Youth Offending Service (YOS), which had a high response rate of between 80-90%, the findings showed there was an overrepresentation of young Black people in the Criminal Justice System, and an update would be presented to the Safer Brent Partnership on participation of young people at their next meeting.

The Committee asked how transitional safeguarding work was being included in the work. Onder Beter advised that the report included information on the ongoing work of exploring and mapping the services currently within the Council and how other departments could work together to address the issue. The Transitional Safeguarding Scrutiny Task Group would also look at this area.

The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.

12. Fostering Service Quarterly Report, Quarter 3 (Oct - Dec 2021)

The purpose of this report was to provide information to the Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the in-house fostering service and how it was achieving good outcomes for children, in accordance with standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).

The report detailed the increase in numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs) currently being supported in Brent, which had doubled compared to the same time the previous year. This was a result of the dispersal of Asylum Seekers by the Home Office into 3 Brent hotels, and some of those subsequently coming forward to claim to be under 18 and therefore children. It had been found that some of those who came forward were children and a lot of activity had been undertaken to ascertain that through age assessments. This had put pressure on the Council's budget through the need to recruit 4 specialist social workers to conduct age assessments and 2 locum lawyers to assist in confronting challenges around judicial reviews.

Nigel Chapman (Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes, Brent Council) added that there had been difficulties with the placement of Asylum Seekers in hotels in Brent for at least 6 months, where the Home Office had not been making the right decisions at port of entry in terms of age assessments, and were then placing young children in adult accommodation who were then going to the Council for support. The Council were also lobbying the Home Office for a more dispersed approach to dealing with new arrivals. Through a meeting with the Home Office, he had been advised that they were planning to increase resources at ports to do age assessments, and would be utilising the national transfer scheme which was now mandatory for local authorities. It was possible that the process for age assessments at ports would change as a result of discussions and could include medical checks. The Council were anticipating a rise in the numbers of people arriving in Spring, once winter was over. A meeting on Friday 21 January was being held with London Councils to see how they could support and challenge the Home Office in relation to the issues outlined.

The Chair advised the Committee that the resources in relation to supporting UASCs had been raised at the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee the previous evening during budget scrutiny. She highlighted there had been very strong feelings from all councillors across parties that the commitment from Brent had been excellent but the Council were bearing the burden of resource constraints which needed to be addressed by Central Government through more funding.

The report also detailed the recruitment efforts for foster carers. Onder Beter highlighted that there were challenges in recruitment, and this was a shared challenge across neighbouring local authorities. There had been some good marketing activity on social media and the data showed a significant increase in the number of people showing an interest in fostering and subscribing to social media. A specific Google campaign was underway, the results of which would be seen in Spring. The report detailed the additional efforts the service was doing to identify any barriers for existing foster carers currently on hold, in order to make them available to foster again. Existing foster carers were also receiving a financial incentive to join the campaign call for action.

Recruitment ideas were discussed, such as placing advertisements in Indian newspapers, posting on 'next door' and through Whatsapp. Councillors raised several online opportunities for them to share information about foster caring to help with the recruitment ask and posters would be shared with the Committee in order for them to disseminate through their channels.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the contents of the report.

13. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 18:50 PM

COUNCILLOR R CONNEELY
Chair