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## MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE Monday 5 February 2024 at 5.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Grahl (Chair), and Councillors Collymore, Dixon, Gbajumo and Hirani

### 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 16 October 2023, be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

### 6. **Matters arising (if any)**

None.

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

J (Care Leavers in Action) informed the Committee that the group had been involved in a commissioning project focused on services supporting young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). This had involved reviewing answers from bidders, evaluating their pros and cons, and giving each bidder score ratings. This had been a new experience for the majority of the group as it was different to how they had been involved in commissioning previously. Care Leavers in Action (CLIA) were also involved in the work on the new Participation Strategy, looking to improve participation for all children and young people, including developing more opportunities for co-design of services. The strategy was currently out for consultation with CLIA and Care in Action (CIA) and the Voice and Influence Subgroup had discussed it and proposed a young person friendly version of the strategy so that it was clear what children and young people should be expecting in terms

of participation. In terms of social activity, CLIA and CIA had went bowling and had a Christmas meal.

K (Care Leavers in Action) added that the groups had done a trip to London Zoo during the October half term, and it had been good for the different age groups to mix together. Care experienced young people had been taking part in interview panels for the recruitment of Social Workers, Personal Advisers and the Participation Team and would be conducting some more soon, and CLIA was focusing on recruiting more care experienced young people to the CLIA and CIA groups. In terms of planning for the future, the group was planning a residential.

The Chair thanked those present for their contributions and invited members of the Committee to ask questions to the CIA / CLIA representatives. The following questions were raised:

The Committee heard that there had been some discussions around how best young people might contribute to Corporate Parenting Committee in future, and there were plans for a mini workshop to take place at the next meeting to hear how young people think the Committee could be improved.

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. **Progress Report - The London Protocol on Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers**

Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the report, which provided a progress update on the London protocol for reducing the criminalisation of Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers and the MOPAC London wide guidance. In introducing the report, she highlighted the following key points:

- The key objectives of the work focused on providing a practice model that aimed to introduce and improve preventative measures, reduce re-offending behaviour and rehabilitate young people who had offended through effective joint working between relevant agencies. The protocol highlighted the impact of previous trauma, attachments issues and specific vulnerabilities of LAC and care leavers. As such, the protocol encouraged agencies to use a trauma-informed approach to practice as well as restorative approaches in a child-centred way to enable integrated, coordinated, and proactive responses to prevent and address challenging offending behaviour.
- It had been found that care experienced children were six times more likely to be criminalised than any other group of children, and just over half of care experienced children would have a criminal conviction by the age of 24 compared to 10% of their non-care experienced peers.
- Although LAC were overrepresented in the UK Youth Justice System, the number of LAC supervised by Brent's Youth Justice Service had halved in the three years between 2021-23.
- Brent continued to focus on the issue of equality and disproportionality in regard to criminalisation, because young people from Black heritage groups were currently overrepresented in the data.
- Priorities for the next year included:
  - exploring how the local authority could work together with accommodation provider forums to reduce the criminalisation of LAC and care leavers by

ensuring staff responses to behavioural difficulties which may be viewed as criminal were proportionate and appropriate and the need for police involvement / court action was minimised.

- training for Foster Carers focused on de-escalation.
- training for Personal Advisors around providing advocacy when supporting young people in prison.
- Implementation of a joint staff forum with LAC providers and the Youth Justice Service.

The Chair thanked Kelli Eboji for her introduction and invited contributions from the Committee, with the following points raised:

Representatives from CLIA asked whether there were any interactive sessions and workshops available to care leavers and LAC to prevent them from going into the Youth Justice System, particularly focused on addressing the statistics included in the report, which they felt would be motivating for young people. They were advised that each individual had their own complexities around prevention. In section 5.15 of the report there were details of 'Your Choice', which was a programme providing training to practitioners working with young people at medium to high risk of harm teaching Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) techniques to use during the delivery of interventions with young people in the programme. The programme had recently started being offered in the LAC and Permanency Service, and was already offered within the Accelerated Support Team and Youth Justice Service. This programme was known to have positive outcomes and it was hoped that by the time young people left care they had removed themselves from criminality and were focused on their future. For young care leavers in custody, they were offered supported accommodation when they left and offered key worker sessions with their probation officer and personal adviser to prevent future escalation.

In relation to the de-escalation training available for foster carers which was a priority for the following year, CLIA representatives highlighted that many foster carers and semi-independent providers may not be aware of that opportunity and asked for further promotion of those sessions. The Committee asked whether the training was being provided because it was common for foster carers to escalate issues to the police, and CLIA representatives highlighted that there was a tendency for foster carers to jump to conclusions and escalate to the police in the first instance if anything went wrong. Kelli Eboji thanked CLIA for the insights. She felt it was important to start that conversation with foster carers through the training and keep that dialogue open to minimise escalation and instead consider what they would do if it were their own child.

The Committee asked for further information around disproportionality and whether there was an action plan to address that. Palvinder Kudhail (Director Integration and Improved Outcomes, Brent Council) highlighted that there were regular discussions about disproportionality and closing that gap. Staff had been through anti-racism training and the service ensured that learning from intense interventions was put into practice and responses were focused on the individual. The Youth Justice Service in Brent had a monthly session with young people which usually included a guest speaker to talk about different topics. Some of the speakers had been involved in the youth justice system in some way in the past and had turned their lives around so these talks were often motivating for young people. It was agreed that the report presented the following year would provide progress updates against the action plan.

The Committee acknowledged that transitions could be a challenging time for children and young people, such as leaving placements and leaving the Youth Justice System from child focused to adult focused. Afzal Ahmed (Service Manager – Leaving Care, Brent Council) agreed that transitions were challenging which was why the Council had a Transitions

Panel which focused on young people in custody due to be rehabilitated into the community. There were early indicators to identify who those young people were, and the Council had developed good relationships with youth offending institutes to plan a pathway early for that young person with their dedicated support officer. That meant that when the young person left custody, they had very clear objectives and actions and were offered intense key worker support within semi-independent provision. That work was done in conjunction with the young person's Probation Officer and focused on de-escalation, engaging them in activities and giving them functional skills to help them realise what they could achieve.

The Committee were unfamiliar with the Home Office Disruption Toolkit and asked for further information on what that was. Afzal Ahmed explained that the toolkit was relevant to practitioners involved in the safeguarding of children and provided advice and guidance on disrupting child exploitation. In response to what happened when the Council were made aware that a child who had been a victim of criminal exploitation was in court, Afzal Ahmed explained that if a young person was known to have been exploited they would have been referred through the National Referral Mechanism and relevant agencies would be aware, including the police and probation, who would then ensure that any preventative work took that information into account.

The Committee noted that the paper detailed positive working with courts to make them more sensitive to the needs and challenges of young people's experiences and asked whether the courts had an insufficient understanding of the challenges of growing up in care and discrimination. Kelli Eboji highlighted that the courts tended to lack an understanding of the vulnerabilities of care experienced young people. One way the Council combatted that was to ensure Social Workers and Youth Justice Workers were working closely together so that when court reports were prepared that information was available and clear to the courts. Discrimination was being tackled through having open dialogue sessions with magistrates to remind them of discrimination and disproportionality and call that out.

The Committee highlighted that a key risk for LAC was being targeted for county lines and asked how the Exploitation, Violence and Vulnerability Panel (EVVP) took action on that specific risk. Afzal Ahmed highlighted that the EVVP worked as a safety planning mechanism. For example, if a young person was at risk of county lines there would be relevant agencies present at the panel to review the case, such as the police and commissioning colleagues, who could make decisions regarding that case. The Panel had a multi-agency framework for looking at one at-risk person and the mechanisms for keeping them safe, and there was a lot of resources and input there from different professionals to prevent further risks.

The Committee asked for historical data to be included in future reports so that they could review any trends and assure themselves that the work was improving.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the content of the report and progress made since the introduction of the London Protocol on reducing the criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers.
- ii) To advocate in support of the key principles set out within the London Protocol on behalf of looked after children and care leavers when exercising their duties as corporate parents.

## 9. Progress Report - Revised Fostering Offer

Kelli Eboji (Head of LAC and Permanency, Brent Council) introduced the revised fostering offer by presenting a short video explaining the benefits of being a foster carer in Brent. In introducing the report, she highlighted the following points:

- A key emphasis over the next year was around promoting the local authority fostering offer, utilising marketing techniques such as the newly created video referenced in section 4.9.3 of the report and competing with independent agencies in the wider market.
- The report detailed a 6-month programme of work, approved by Council Management Team, exploring ways to improve and increase placement sufficiency and save money in terms of the large amounts being spent on semi-independent agencies.
- The revised offer was due to be implemented in April 2024. The background and rationale for the changes in the offer was that, between 2017 and 2023, there was an almost 40% reduction of in-house capacity in Brent fostering households and beds / placements. This was being experienced nationwide, where nationally around 1/8<sup>th</sup> of fostering households left their roles in 2021-22.
- Brent currently had 23 fostering households aged 65 or over, and part of forward planning was around recruitment of foster carers when those older carers retired.
- As a result of the national reduction of fostering households, Brent had become reliant on commissioning independent fostering agencies, so the Council had looked to improve recruitment through the revised offer to avoid costly independent placements.
- Section 4.1.4 of the report highlighted that benchmarking showed the allowance offer previously was not competitive compared to Brent's West London neighbours, so the first priority for the revised offer had been to look at that, and section 4.2 outlined the different elements of the new offer, including an increase in the weekly fostering allowance and a new digital offer for foster carers, as well as leisure offers.
- The offer also introduced a range of initiatives to support placement stability, including a LAC resilience service which was a new programme in the test and learn phase.
- The service was working with HR to make Brent a foster friendly organisation and was developing policies in line with that approach. Alongside this work was being done with West London colleagues to work towards a joint fostering recruitment hub.

The Chair thanked officers for the update and invited comments and questions from Committee members with the following raised:

In relation to the weekly fostering allowance, the Committee asked whether there was a connection between a higher allowance and an increase in the recruitment of foster carers. Kelli Eboji advised there was no direct correlation that could be evidenced, but there were higher levels of enquiries with increased weekly allowances. Brent had identified itself as operating in a competitive area with many fostering agencies within Brent and its border. Many boroughs were offering more, and Brent was losing its constituents to those boroughs and the independent sector which often offered double the allowance offered by local authorities. In response to whether nominated carers receive an allowance or training, the Committee was advised that nominated carers were typically not paid an allowance, although if they provided respite care for the foster carer then there would be an agreement with the foster carer that they would contribute to the costs associated with that. This was not an additional expense for the Council and agreed within the fostering household. The support programmes on offer with the revised offer would be made available for the whole fostering network so nominated carers would benefit from that.

The Committee asked about the offer of Council tax exemption and how that would work. Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children and Young People, Brent Council) explained that the Council currently offered Council tax exemptions for Brent care leavers regardless of where in the UK they lived. In the next financial year, the Council was aiming to get an exemption for Brent foster carers in the same way, as either a full exemption or a discount. This was within the Council's gift to offer and was not something independent agencies could offer so it acted as a good incentive to foster with Brent.

The Committee asked for clarification on the LAC resilience service outlined in the report and why it was spoken about in the context of hospital discharge. Kelli Eboji explained that it was compared to the hospital discharge process in the report because the service used the same positive behaviour therapeutic approach. The discharge service offered therapeutic wraparound support for young people who had been discharged from hospital, whereas the resilience service was focused on LAC and foster carers where they struggled to maintain a placement and had experienced multiple breakdowns. As such, the resilience service was aimed at both the LAC and foster carer.

The Committee highlighted feedback they had heard from foster carers that the package they received was not well communicated before they become a foster carer. They asked if anything was being done to improve that communication to ensure the package was clear beforehand. Officers confirmed that the service was working with the Council's Communications Department on this currently in the same way that it had communicated the local offer to care leavers.

The Committee commended the offer of a blue light card for fostering households.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note and advocate for the need for Brent to improve its offer to foster carers in order to increase the number of in house foster carers and improve retention rates.
- ii) To note the benefits of ongoing work to establish a regional West London Fostering Hub.

## 10. **Progress Report - Brent Residential Children's Home**

The Chair introduced the report which provided an update on the progress to establish a residential children's care home in Brent. She highlighted that a Cabinet decision to purchase a property for the use of establishing the care home was currently subject to a valid call-in which was due to be discussed by the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee on Monday 12 February 2024. Until that Committee had met, the decision to purchase a property in Wembley for the purpose of the care home could not be implemented. The report detailed further updates on the progress of the children's residential care home project.

Michelle Gwyther (Head of Forward Planning Performance and Partnerships, Brent Council) added that feedback from children and young people was integral in designing the operation of the home. There were a number of activities designed with care experienced young people to gather their feedback, including an exciting drawing competition where young people could design one of the bedrooms of the care home.

In considering the reports, the following points were raised:

Assuming the project was able to progress, the Committee felt that a residential children's care home in Brent would be hugely beneficial to children and young people in the borough, and the project had been well planned to offer significant savings to the Council.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the contents of the report.

## 11. **Health Annual Report for Looked After Children 2022-2023**

Esther Power (Designated Nurse – Children in Care - Brent & Hounslow – NHS NWL) and Kate Head (Designated doctor for Children Looked After - Harrow, Hillingdon and Brent – NHS NWL) provided a presentation on the health needs of Looked After Children (LAC) across NWL. The following key points were highlighted:

- There had been a close focus on inequalities for children and young people over the past 2 years, and the health service had signed up to the Care Leaver's Covenant, which looked to reduce barriers for LAC and care leavers into getting employment and training in the NHS.
- In terms of health inequalities, it was highlighted that LAC were 4 times more likely to have a mental health need, behavioural and emotional difficulties, substance misuse, or experience teenage pregnancy.
- It was highlighted that many children became looked after as a result of abuse and neglect and as such, although they had many of the same health issues as their peers, the extent of those health issues was often greater because of their past experiences.
- There were 348 LAC in Brent which was higher than other NWL boroughs had who provided that data.
- In terms of the health needs identified during initial and review health assessments, the top themes were around CAMHS, dentistry and immunisations. There was a large range of health issues reported at 431 health needs across 127 individual health assessments, meaning many had more than one identified health need.
- 77% of children and young people reported an emotional health need, and some children may have reported an emotional health need but were not necessarily accessing CAMHS or counselling.
- 38% of children and young people over 10 years old reported sleep issues, which was high.
- In relation to growth and development, the percentage of children and young people with incomplete immunisations was 33.85%. As immunisations were a premise for good health all children would be expected to have complete immunisations. This data may have been skewed by the high number Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) in the borough, as often they attended health reviews with incomplete health records.
- In terms of UASC health specifically, some health needs identified were around sleep, dentistry, counselling, and infectious disease screening. 50 UASCs reported a mental health need, 22 reported gastro issues and 31 reported skin infections. It was highlighted that, compared to the data from the rest of the population, there were some outliers in health needs identified for UASC relating to their unique experiences. UASC also had lower incidences of therapeutic input relative to reported emotional health and wellbeing needs.
- Suggested interventions to tackle health inequalities, high rates of incomplete immunisations and high rates of dental issues were being discussed by the

Integrated Care Board (ICB). It was highlighted that if significant health needs were being identified, then there was a need to work jointly as corporate parents to ensure young people had access to services. As an ongoing piece of work the health service was looking to review the health needs of the LAC and care leaver population, and some areas of NWL had appointed a Transition Care Leaver Nurse to work with young people over 16 years old.

The Chair thanked colleagues for the presentation and invited comments and questions from those present, with the following raised:

The Committee asked about the additional support on offer for LAC and care leavers experiencing mental health issues or emotional wellbeing issues. They were advised that the health service had seen an increased number of young people attending A & E departments in distress, and so CAMHS were looking at where the most suitable placements were for young people to be discharged and what support could be put in place. There was now a Children and Young People Mental Health Working Group scoping all services across the ICB and how they could be improved, informed by engagement with children and young people.

The Committee asked for further information about the Specialist Services for UASC. They were advised that the Unity Clinic covered health assessments, emotional wellbeing screenings, and infectious disease screenings in one appointment. The health service wanted the infectious disease screening to be more joined up across NWL as some areas of NWL required multiple referrals which held up the process. It was highlighted that in Brent this was quite well-managed compared to other boroughs, so the ICB was looking to make this more equitable for all UASC across NWL. The Council was currently in discussions with the health service to consider the joint commissioning of a service for UASC emotional wellbeing.

The Committee asked what the difficulties were in maintaining frequency of health assessments and supporting the health needs of LAC. They heard that the reason it was difficult to manage was due to the frequency of LAC moving around and language barriers. Due to the need to use independent fostering agencies and make placements out of borough, many LAC were not placed in the local area and it was difficult from a health perspective to have oversight of that and be aware of health services in other areas. Getting to know young people was very important in ensuring there was consistency in health, so building relationships where UASC felt they could trust healthcare professionals was important and key in identifying exploitation. Esther Power was involved in Strategy discussions all the way through to health assessments ensuring that trust and consistency of professional. Another aspect of supporting LAC and care leavers with their health needs was around empowering young people to manage their own health and supporting young people to advocate for themselves. The service was also looking to attend as many forums as possible to hear directly from young people what they needed from their health services and what was affecting them.

The Chair felt there had been some interesting ideas raised to pilot future programmes and was pleased to have colleagues from health attending the Committee on an annual basis. The Committee hoped to integrate health more into the Committee in future to have more of a collaborative approach going forward.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the contents of the presentation.

## 12. **Any other urgent business**



None.

The meeting closed at 6:45pm

COUNCILLOR GWEN GRAHL  
Chair

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