



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

Thursday 26 April 2018 at 5.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor M Patel (Chair) and Councillors Conneely, Hossain and Thomas

Also Present: Councillor McLennan

1. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members

Nigel Chapman (Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes) advised that he was representing Gail Tolley (Strategic Director Children and Young People), who was on annual leave and had submitted apologies for the meeting.

2. Declarations of interests

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 2 February 2018 be approved as an accurate record.

4. Matters arising (if any)

Nigel Chapman (Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes) provided the following updates:

- Minute item 6, Resolution i)
A foster carer would be invited to attend the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee.
- Minute item 6, Resolution ii)
The summary of the National Fostering Stocktake report had been included in the report for agenda item 8, the 'Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: 1 January to 31 March 2018'.
- Minute item 9, Resolution iii)
The Assistant Director, Brent CCG would be invited to attend the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee.

5. Update from Care In Action Representatives

Representatives from Care in Action provided a detailed update on the activities of the group since the previous meeting of the committee. Members heard that as part of a procurement process undertaken through the West London Alliance Framework Agreement, ND and HM had taken part in the evaluation of semi-independent placement/accommodation providers. ND further advised that two LAC

nurses had attended the recent CIA meeting during which the group discussed the proposal to develop a health passport. The CIA had proposed that the health passport could be encompassed within the Pathway Plan app currently being developed. ND also highlighted the work she had undertaken via the 'Elements' project, which included a range of confidence boosting activities culminating in an art exhibition. This had been held at the Wembley Stadium Learning Zone and had been very successful.

CM outlined the results of a recent meeting which had focussed on how safe LAC and Care Leavers felt in a range of different settings including at home, college and on social media. The feedback had largely been that young people felt safe at home and at school/college and had good days and bad days on social media, though generally felt protected by the control they had over this medium. The young people had expressed that being around people who had taken drugs or were drunk would make them feel unsafe. The importance of having people to talk to such as teachers and friends was highlighted. Responding to a question from the Deputy Leader of the Council, CM confirmed that the new lighting in the borough was brighter but had not yet been installed everywhere. ND added that there should be a greater concentration of lighting in certain areas such as parks.

JBK spoke on the feedback gathered from LAC and Care Leavers about what they felt made a good social worker, an activity which had been undertaken for World Social Worker Day. The responses had included listening to young people and acting on what was being shared. The committee also heard that the Voice in a Million concert had taken place on 14 and 15 March 2018 to raise awareness of Children in Care and had been an inspirational event.

HM explained that she had recently been elected as Deputy Chair for the relatively new London wide Children in Care Council. The London Children in Care Council had three campaigns focusing on education, money management and accommodation. HM advised that the meeting of the London Children in Care Council had been useful but there was room for improvement and it was intended to invite Directors of Children's Services from the London Boroughs to future meetings to help kick start initiative. HM further noted that officers from the Digital Team had been working with CIA members to develop proposals for the Pathway Plan app.

PE explained that CIA had recently reviewed the Local Offer and it had been agreed that the content should be streamlined into a small booklet version. The design would mimic the Care Leavers' Charter. Members of Care Leavers in Action had discussed the Children and Social Work Act 2017 which was updated on 1 April 2018 and sought confirmation of the implications of the update. Onder Beter explained that LAC/Care Leavers after the age of 21 could continue to be supported up to the age of 24 if they chose. PE concluded his update by announcing that he had stood down as Chair of Care in Action due to commitments in his personal life. PE advised that it had been a rewarding role and thanked the committee for their interest and support.

In the subsequent discussion, the committee reflected on the issue of loneliness for young people. Sarah Miller (Head of Inclusion and Headteacher, Brent Virtual School) highlighted the work being undertaken around support for LAC and Care Leavers attending university, advising that the possibility of establishing a phone support line staffed by a trained counsellor was being explored. The counsellor, in

addition to providing direct support, would have the option of engaging with the university's pastoral support services and the young person's personal advisor. The closure of youth facilities was discussed as a contributing factor, as members of the CIA expressed that these were considered safe spaces in which young people could interact and engage with each other in positive ways. Councillor M Patel (Lead Member for Children and Young People) highlighted that Brent Council's successful bid to be the Borough of Culture 2020 would provide opportunities to host activities for young people, who had been at the heart of the bid. Nigel Chapman added that discussions were being held about youth provision in Brent and work was underway to update the youth services webpage and to develop a youth service app for council and other community services. It was agreed that the youth services app should be trialled by CIA.

The Chair thanked the members of CIA for the comprehensive updates provided and congratulated HM on her election as Vice Chair of the London Children in Care Council. The committee thanked PE for his hard work and dedication to the role of Chair of CIA and wished him well in his future endeavours.

RESOLVED:

- i) That the update provided by Care in Action representatives be noted;
- ii) That the Strategic Director, Children and Young People ensure that members of Care in Action have the opportunity to trial the Youth Services app;
- iii) That the committee's thanks be extended to PE for his dedication shown to the role of Chair of Care in Action.

6. Annual Report - Brent Virtual School

Sarah Miller (Head of Inclusion and Headteacher, Brent Virtual School) introduced the Annual Report of the Brent Virtual School (BVS) 2016/17. Members attention was drawn to summary statement of impact for 2016/17 set out at paragraph 2 of the report. There were 219 school age Brent LAC and the committee heard that: 95 per cent of these children were in good or outstanding schools; there had been no permanent exclusions for this cohort; and there had been fewer temporary exclusions. Academic attainment had been strong, with Year 2 and Year 6 attainment higher than national averages for LAC. Sarah Miller emphasised that the Virtual School also offered an exciting enrichment programme, illustrated at Appendices 1 and 2 to the report. This programme included theatre trips, outdoor activities, celebration events and trips to universities.

Sarah Miller highlighted that a significant change in the support offered by the Virtual School was the extension of support to KS5 (post 16). This support had been increased in 2016/17, with the establishment of a Personal Advisor for Years 12 and 13 in the BVS. A key remit of the BVS was training, which was offered to social workers, foster carers and designated teachers in schools, among others. Sarah Miller emphasised that it was really important to help schools understand the context of LAC and similarly, to ensure that foster carers have high aspirations for the children they cared for. In concluding the introduction, Sarah Miller noted that

there was a key challenge going forward with regard to KS4 attainment, with a high percentage of children coming into care quite late.

During Members' discussion, queries were raised regarding apprenticeships and work experience opportunities for Year 12 and 13 LAC and the tutoring support provided to these young people. Further information was subsequently sought on: the training offered to schools; the relationship between Brent's schools and the Virtual School; the progress made regarding exclusions; and, the new Enrichment Co-ordinator post.

Responding to the queries raised, Sarah Miller advised that the BVS identified the 'destinations' of all Year 11 pupils for the start of the next academic year. These destinations could include apprenticeships or sixth form and a Year 11 Life Coach was available to help those pupils choose their next steps. A tutoring programme was provided by the BVS and Brent had recently run a pilot programme in conjunction with the Institute of Education, London University, which provided one to one tutoring in core subjects for Year 11 LAC. The pilot had revealed that tutoring was particularly effective when delivered by a teacher at the school attended by the pupil. Other support provided included mentoring, mental health support and supporting exam retakes or delaying exams to the next academic year where appropriate.

Sarah Miller emphasised that the BVS worked to build good relationships with schools. It was known that LAC would do less well when not in a mainstream setting so it was very important that everything was done to prevent exclusions and to help schools understand the needs of LAC. Training was open to all Brent schools and this was very positively received. Much of the day to day work of being the Head Teacher of the Virtual School was to challenge potential exclusions and persuade schools to consider alternative measures such as changes to timetables and pastoral support. Historically the key contact in a school was the Designated Teacher for LAC, often the Head or Deputy Head Teacher. With regard to the Enrichment Officer post, Sarah Miller advised that this was new to the BVS and was funded by the John Lyons Charity, following discussions around a lack of capacity for event organisation within the BVS.

The Chair thanked the officers for their contribution to the meeting.

RESOLVED: that the Brent Virtual School Annual Report for 2016/17 be noted.

7. Brent Adoption Service Report - 1 October 2017 - 31 March 2018

Onder Beter (Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency) introduced the Brent Adoption Service Report, 1 October 2017 to 31 March 2018. Members' attention was drawn to the performance data set out at section 4 of the report. The committee heard that performance against the two most significant indicators had continued to improve, these being A1 - the time taken from a child entering care to being placed for adoption, and A2 – the time from receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved. There had been a 26 per cent improvement for A1 since the previous reporting period and at 378.7 days, this was significantly lower than the national average of 558 days. Similarly, there had been a 12 per cent improvement for A2 since the previous reporting

period, and this measure too fell significantly below the national average. Members were informed that there had been nine children adopted in 2017/18 and as at 31 March 2018, there were 12 children with a plan of adoption who had not yet been adopted, the reasons for which were set out in the report. Outlining adopter recruitment activity, Onder Beter highlighted that at 31 March 2018 there were five adoptive households waiting for an adoptive placement.

Members were subsequently directed to section 6 of the report which set out service improvements. Onder Beter noted that Brent's first Child Appreciation Day was being organised. These days aimed to bring all professionals working with the child to meet prospective adopters, share information and show appreciation of the child's journey. A festive party for kinship carers had also been held for the first time and had been very well received. Quarterly support groups had been established for Special Guardianship Carers and monthly drop in sessions were now held for Birth Parents. In concluding his introduction, Onder Beter reminded members of the impending regionalisation of Adoption and advised that a report was scheduled to be submitted to the Cabinet in September 2018 detailing proposals for how this would proceed.

In the following discussion, the committee questioned whether support for the letter box exchange had commenced. Members queried whether the level of adoptive households was in keeping with the numbers of children being placed for adoption and sought particular comment on the efforts to recruit Somali adopters. Members also sought clarification on the financial implication of a Brent adopter being matched with a child from another local authority area and requested details of matching considerations for LGBT adopters.

Responding to the queries raised, Onder Beter advised that he would seek confirmation on the progress of the letterbox exchange. With regard to the number of adoptive households, recruitment activity would be accelerated in the coming months to reflect the national increase in the number of children waiting to be adopted. The activities aimed at recruiting Somali adopters had generated a number of enquiries, one of which had progressed to an assessment but work would be ongoing. Nigel Chapman explained that a standardised transfer fee was charged for an adopter being matched with a child from another local authority area. With regard to the process of matching a child with prospective adopters, each case was judged separately and the prospective adopters' wishes and strengths would be taken into consideration.

The Chair thanked the officers for their contribution to the meeting.

RESOLVED: that the Brent Adoption Service Report, 1 October 2017 to 31 March 2018 be noted.

8. Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: 1 January to 31 March 2018

Onder Beter (Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency) introduced the Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: 1 January to 31 March 2018. Members were advised that there had been a slight improvement in the number of children placed with in house Brent foster carers (29.4 per cent against the corporate performance target of 35 per cent). There had also been a

slight reduction in the numbers of children placed with Independent Fostering Agency carers (27.3 percent, against a target of 25 per cent). Nigel Chapman (Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes) highlighted that the numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) had started to decline, in part due to the national transfer scheme.

With reference to a high profile case which had recently appeared in the media in relation to another London authority, a member queried whether Brent council had ever experienced any complaints regarding LAC being pressured by foster carers to follow particular religions or ways of life. Further queries were raised regarding the support, financial and practical, provided to UASC to go through the process of obtaining British Citizenship.

Nigel Chapman assured the committee that the training and approval process for foster carers emphasised the likelihood of having to care for a child of a different faith or culture and the need to be able to positively promote a child's heritage. Religion and cultural background were considerations of the matching process and would be aligned when possible. Onder Beter reiterated that the training provided to foster carers made it clear that they needed to be respectful of the religious beliefs of the children and indeed their birth parents.

Addressing the committee's queries on the support provided to UASC in relation to the citizenship process, Onder Beter advised that the statuses of all LAC were being reviewed to identify those without British citizenship and to develop action plans. For those young people going through the process, in addition to providing general support, the council would sign post young people to specialist forms of support such as the Refugee Law Centre.

The Chair thanked the officers for their contribution to the meeting.

RESOLVED: that the Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report: 1 January to 31 March 2018 be noted.

9. Any other urgent business

The Chair noted that for two members of the committee, Councillors Hossain and Thomas, the current meeting would be their last as Brent Councillors, as they were not seeking re-election on 3 May 2018. The Chair expressed her thanks to Councillors Hossain and Thomas for their significant and valued contribution to the Corporate Parenting Committee.

The meeting closed at 7.08 pm

M PATEL
Chair