



MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE
Wednesday 24 April 2019 at 5.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor M Patel (Chair), Councillor Conneely (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Gbajumo, Kansagra and Thakkar

Also Present: Councillor McLennan

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)

No deputations were received.

5. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 4 February 2019 be agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

6. Matters arising (if any)

None raised.

7. Order of Business

RESOLVED: that the order of business be amended as below.

8. National protocol on reducing the criminalisation of looked after children

Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency) introduced the report on the National Protocol on Reducing Unnecessary Criminalisation of Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers. The report summarised the Protocol, outlined current practice in Brent and detailed activities underway to further sharpen Brent's response to this issue. Members were reminded that the committee had previously received a report on 'Brent Looked After Children and Offending Behaviour' in October 2017, which had highlighted many of the same themes and considerations.

The Committee heard that the Protocol was jointly published by the Department for Education (DfE), Home Office and Ministry of Justice (MoJ) in November 2018. It was aimed at local authority children's services, local care providers, youth offending services, the crown prosecution service, police, HM Courts and Tribunal Services, and local health services. The objectives and key principles of the Protocol focussed on a practice model that aimed to introduce preventative measures, reduce re-offending behaviour and rehabilitate young people who had offended via joint working between relevant agencies. The protocol drew attention to the impact of previous trauma, attachment issues and specific vulnerabilities of looked after children and care leavers and recommended the use of child centred, restorative approaches to address challenging offending behaviour.

Onder Beter advised that Brent was already proactive at ensuring LAC were not unnecessarily criminalised and the principles of the protocol were already embedded in much of the work of the council at both a strategic and operational level. Members heard that Brent's Practice Framework included a restorative approach, which was used as appropriate by the Brent Youth Offending Service (YOS). The council had also embedded the Signs of Safety model across its social work practice and provided interventions in line with the suggested practice model. Whilst LAC young people continued to be over represented in the youth justice system, it was encouraging that the overall number of LAC young people supported by the YOS in Brent had reduced from 32 to 24 between June 2017 and January 2019. Onder Beter advised that further work was still required, particularly with regard to Care Leavers. The LAC and Permanency Service had developed strong relationships with the YOS and other partners but further work was needed to continue to sharpen practice and to improve the connection with the Probation Service.

The Chair thanked Onder Beter for the introduction to the report and invited questions and contributions from the committee.

Members sought further information about the preventative interventions provided by the council and its partners, and how young people were supported to cease offending behaviour, including exiting gang activity. Members noted that living in areas of high crime and deprivation was a commonly observed theme for the cohort of LAC and care leavers who had come into contact with offending, alongside difficulties relating to custody and resettlement in the community. It was subsequently questioned what actions were taken to address these issues, what further work was required in this area and to what degree these issues were prioritised when identifying an appropriate placement for a child. Comment was sought with regard to another theme highlighted in the report relating to inconsistent outcomes for children placed in residential homes. A member noted that 58 per

cent of the 24 Brent LAC young people supervised by YOS in January 2019 had committed drugs offences and questioned whether these were serious drug offences, noting that it would be concerning if a young person were to receive a Referral Order for a minor possession offence. Questions were also raised regarding the support provided to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC).

In response to the committee's queries, Nigel Chapman (Operational Director, Integration and Improved Outcomes) explained that there were a variety of Brent specific programmes provided via the YOS to support young people's exit from gang and knife crime activity. It was noted that the numbers of young people classed as first time entrants to the criminal justice system were small and the focus for this cohort was to divert them to programmes aimed at preventing further criminalisation. It was clarified that the YOS supported young people under the age of 18. Those aged 18 years old and over would fall under the remit of the Probation Service. It was further highlighted that in response to a recommendation from the council's outcome based review of gangs, an Accelerated Support Team had been established to quickly provide a greater presence where needed and offer a combination of support. It was noted that being excluded from school was a contributing factor to vulnerability. There was a positive direction of travel in Brent in this regard with smaller numbers of permanent and fixed exclusions than previous years, and Brent's schools working with the council to help these children and young people remain in the school system.

Onder Beter addressed members' queries regarding housing difficulties and priorities for placement of LAC young people leaving secure accommodation/prison. It was explained that for those under 18, a resettlement meeting was held to plan and co-ordinate the wrap around support for a young person – this included placement options. Some young people would be placed outside of Brent for their safety. It was emphasised that the greater challenge lay in supporting Care Leavers, particularly where there were license conditions in place which prevented their returning to certain areas. It was clarified that the Probation Service was responsible for identifying suitable accommodation for those aged 18 and over leaving prison but a care leaver's Personal Advisor would advocate for the young person in such circumstances. There had been examples of where the council and the Probation Service had worked together to deliver a really good rehabilitation package but work was required to further develop this relationship. There were Probation officers located within the YOS and the Brent Family Front Door service. The key issue for the council was to ensure that recommendations made in partnership with the YOS via the YOS Management Board were also driven through for care leavers. It was explained that the Board reported to the Safer Brent Partnership which included Probation Service representation.

Gail Tolley (Strategic Director, Children and Young People) informed the committee that there were 6 privately run residential children's homes in Brent; however, the council would only place children in residential homes outside of the borough due to the associated risks of these placements. It was acknowledged that some children's homes did not manage challenging behaviours very well and had been found for instance, to escalate matters to the police when situations could have been dealt with in a more positive way. Nigel Chapman advised that there had been progress in addressing some of the issues with residential children's homes. Ofsted had recently closed a number of residential homes across the country in response to a

range of issues. There were now more residential children's homes rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted but there was also a reduction in capacity across the system. Whilst this type of provision was not specifically rated against compliance with the Protocol, Ofsted inspections would identify if there were issues with disproportionate responses to children's behaviours. The council had also improved the quality assessment framework for residential children's homes and additional work in this area was underway at a sub-regional level via the West London Alliance.

Onder Beter confirmed that the drugs offences recorded for the Brent LAC young people being supported by the YOS in January 2019 varied in degree and this was reflected in the package of support offered to them. The LAC and Permanency service had a good partnership with the YOS and the joint protocol with the YOS had been recognised as an example of good practice.

With regard to UASC, the council undertook a needs analysis which included a risk assessment of vulnerabilities. The concerns raised in the report related more to the national issue of a young person's UASC status not being explicit when they came into contact with the criminal justice system. This was not deemed a particular issue for Brent's LAC young people.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contribution to the meeting.

RESOLVED:

- i) That a report on how the council was supporting the strengthening of residential children's homes and semi-independent provision be submitted to a future meeting of the committee.
- ii) That the Annual Report on LAC include statistics on the number of LAC and Care Leavers known to the criminal justice system.

9. Update from Care In Action and Care Leavers in Action Representatives

JBK provided an update on the activities of Care in Action and Care Leavers in Action since the last meeting. The committee heard that the Junior Care in Action group had taken a trip to Kidzania and everyone had had a really good day. It was explained that Kidzania was a play city for children which allowed children to do different jobs such as radio show presenter, police officer, paramedic, fire fighter, tour guide and window cleaner. JBK had helped to supervise the visit and explained that it had been really fun but very hectic.

Care Leavers in Action had previously discussed the issue of cases being closed, sometimes without the knowledge of the young person, once a care leaver reached the age of 21. In response to the anxieties expressed regarding this matter, a council officer had attended the session to discuss the matter. JBK advised that he felt that the concerns of the care leavers had been taken on board. Onder Beter explained that sometimes a case would be closed if it was felt that there was no need for involvement at that current time. This did not however, exclude the possibility of the council providing further support to the young person in the future and they would always be encouraged to get in touch with any issues. Nigel Chapman explained that it had been a year since the council had developed and

published its Care Leavers Offer and officers were currently in the process of reviewing the offer and seeking feedback from care leavers.

JBK advised that since the last meeting he had performed a solo in the Voice in a Million concert held at Wembley Arena. The committee and officers present congratulated JBK on this achievement.

The Chair thanked JBK for the update.

10. **Adoption Service 6-monthly report and regionalisation update**

Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency) introduced the Brent Adoption Service Report for 1 October 2018 to 31 March 2019, highlighting that the council continued to perform well against the national indicator for the number of days between the date a child becomes a Looked After Child and the date that they are adopted. There had been a slight increase from the previous reporting period due to a particular case in which parents had appealed against their children being subject to a Placement Order, leading to a longer court process. Brent continued to perform better than the national or London average for this measure. The committee was informed that during this reporting period there had been three children adopted, five approvals of adoptive households, with six ongoing, and 11 applications for the Adoptions Support Fund (ASF). Onder Beter added that Brent was one of the West London authorities which most utilised the ASF.

Members' attention was subsequently drawn to the update on the regionalisation of adoption. The committee heard that the Chair, Councillor M Patel, as Lead Member for Children's Safeguarding, Early Help and Social Care, had presented the proposed arrangements for the West London Regional Adoption Agency (Adopt London West) between Brent, Hammersmith and Fulham, Hounslow and Ealing to the Cabinet. The proposals had been approved by the Cabinet. Hounslow Council and Ealing Council had also approved the proposals, leaving only Hammersmith and Fulham Council to complete the approval process. Consideration was now being given to when to commence the formal consultation process with staff affected by the changes. Various work streams were progressing at different levels to agree the detail of the arrangement. A draft partnership agreement setting out how the four local authorities would work together was currently being reviewed by the councils' legal departments. It was now anticipated that the new arrangements would be implemented from September 2019.

In response to a query, Nigel Chapman confirmed that Ealing would remain the lead authority for the Regional Adoption Agency but would be required to report to the West London Regionalisation Steering Group. Brent was represented on this Group by Gail Tolley as the Statutory Director of Children's Services for the borough. Brent Council would retain responsibility for ensuring that its adoption performance remained outstanding and furthermore, Adopt London West would be required to provide an annual performance report. Commenting on the arrangements for the Adoption Panel, Nigel Chapman explained that the details were still being agreed, but it was expected that there would be one Panel for all four authorities to ensure a more efficient use of resources. Further details would be shared with the committee when available.

In the subsequent discussion, the Committee welcomed the number of foster carers who had gone on to adopt the children they cared for. Several queries were raised regarding the frequency and impact of parents appealing against Placement Orders. Members questioned how many cases exceeded the 26 weeks' target for resolution. In concluding their questions, the committee sought further details regarding the impact of the £5k cap on the ASF and on adoption placement breakdowns.

Responding to the questions raised, Onder Beter advised that appeals by parents were not very common and it was rare for them to be successful as cases went through a process of intense scrutiny and it was a last resort for a judge to agree a Placement Order. Though an appeal might create delay for a child's adoption, it would not create any disruption to their placement. Each case was meant to be resolved by the Family Courts within 26 weeks. The council monitored this and did apply pressure to bring cases forward as quickly as possible. Currently, cases brought by the council were taking approximately 30 weeks. Again, whilst this did create some delay for the children, it would not cause any disruption to their placements.

Onder Beter advised that it was rare that the council would spend over £5k for a support package but there were cases where this was needed and the council maintained a list of various providers to ensure cost effectiveness. The feedback from workers and adopters was very positive about the ASF. The future of the ASF was not certain but there were plans via the Regional Adoption Agency to lobby for a similar resource. All other members of the Regional Adoption Agency were being urged to make use of the ASF to support any such action.

Nigel Chapman confirmed that less than 5 percent of adoptions would breakdown at some point. There were some examples of adoptions which had broken down when children were in the mid to late teenage years but at that point they would be treated as any other family experiencing these issues. The council did provide a clinical psychologist to support adopters post-placement.

The Chair thanked the officers for the responses.

RESOLVED:

The Corporate Parenting Committee recommended that the Adoption Panel of Adopt London West include an elected representative from the respective authorities in the pool of panel members.

11. **Fostering Service Quarterly Report**

Onder Beter (Head of LAC and Permanency) introduced the Brent Fostering Service Quarterly Monitoring Report for the period 1 January 2019 to 31 March 2019. Members' attention was drawn to the summary of activities regarding foster carer recruitment. Onder Beter highlighted that 13 assessments had commenced during the reporting period with eight at Stage1 and five at Stage 2 of the process. There had been significant increase in the targeted recruitment activity and outreach activity undertaken, including an increased social media presence, following the recruitment of a Marketing Officer. This was reflected in the increased number of assessments from the last reporting period.

Outlining other key developments, Onder Beter highlighted the positive reception of the social pedagogue approach, noting that an art intervention workshop for foster carers, their birth children and foster children had been really well received. The committee further heard that one of the Fostering Team's Supervising Social Workers had acquired a Level 3 Diploma in Social Pedagogy. This enabled her to work closely with Brent's Social Pedagogue to assist in implementing social pedagogic practice.

In concluding his introduction to the report, Onder Beter updated members on the work with neighbouring local authorities to develop combined, needs-led, targeted marketing and recruitment and commissioning. The council was currently leading on this work, with Ealing and Hounslow councils and a bid was due to be submitted to the Department for Education for seed funding to further explore the feasibility of a joined up service for the three authorities.

The Chair thanked Onder Beter for his introduction to the report.

Reflecting on the feedback received from foster carers at a previous meeting of the committee, members subsequently questioned whether the take up of training was affected by the school holidays. Noting the recent successes in increasing targeted foster carer recruitment activity, the committee questioned the timeline for this being reflected in performance data for the percentage of children placed with in-house foster carers. During the discussion, members reiterated their request for further information about the quality of semi-independent provision.

With the permission of the Chair, Councillor McLennan queried whether Hammersmith and Fulham Council would be joining the work to develop joint recruitment and commissioning activity.

Onder Beter confirmed that officers were reviewing the learning and development offer for foster carers and were taking in to consideration the views shared by carers, including those regarding availability. Members were further informed that it was likely that it would take at least six months to see an impact of increased recruitment activity, but the placement of children with in-house foster carers would still be dependent on the profile and needs of Brent's LAC population. Nigel Chapman (Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes) confirmed that a report would be submitted to a future meeting of the committee on Semi-Independent Accommodation. It was highlighted that a multiagency audit of this provision had recently been undertaken via a work stream of the Brent Children's Trust and the update to the committee would include the findings from this audit. It was confirmed that Hammersmith and Fulham had shown interest in the work to develop a joint recruitment and commissioning service but Hammersmith and Fulham council remained embedded in their tri-borough arrangements.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contribution to the discussion.

12. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 6.43 pm

COUNCILLOR MILI PATEL
Chair