

Corporate Parenting Committee

MINUTES of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on Wednesday 1 March 2023 at 2.00 pm at 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Jasmine Ali (Chair)
Councillor Charlie Smith (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Naima Ali
Councillor Rachel Bentley
Councillor Esme Dobson
Councillor Natasha Ennin

**NON-VOTING
CO-OPTED
MEMBERS** Dr Mark Kerr, subject matter expert

**OFFICER
SUPPORT:** Alasdair Smith, Director of Children Service
Helen Woolgar, Assistant Director – Safeguarding and Care
Andrew Fowler, Head of Service: Children In Care and Careleavers
Suzanne Green, Programme Lead, Children and Adult's Services
Elaine Maxwell-Reid, Head of Service: Permanence and Resources
Dr Jenny Taylor, Head of Clinical Service
Joy Edwards, Designated Nurse for Looked after Children
Dechaun Malcolm, Children's Rights and Participation Officer
Young people and representatives from Speakerbox
Clare Ryan, Service Manager, Looked after Children, Children and Adult's Services
Usha Singh, Virtual Headteacher
Cheryl Russell, Director of Resident Services
Karen Shaw, Head of Housing Solutions
Paula Thornton, Constitutional Officer
Poonam Patel, Departmental Coordinator, Children and Adults' Services
Beverley Olamijulo, Constitutional Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from:

Dr Stacy John-Legere, designated doctor for looked after children.

2. CONFIRMATION OF VOTING MEMBERS

The members listed as present were confirmed as the voting members for the meeting.

3. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

There were none.

4. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

None were disclosed.

5. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2022 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the chair

6. SPEAKERBOX VERBAL UPDATE

Dechaun Malcolm, children's rights and participation officer provided a verbal update to the committee. He was present with two young people who had been members of SpeakerBox for 6 years and 9 years respectively.

Dechaun outlined the following:

- Housing – addressing housing complaints and a carers' relationship with their lead workers
- Independent affordable housing and access to advocacy support was difficult
- Complaints: Communication surrounding complaints was a major concern raised by young people

- Lead workers – address issues regarding difficulty with care plan
- Support and plan – Clare Ryan, service manager - looked after children, children's and adults' services works closely with teams to prevent issues from arising and ensuring the necessary training takes place
- SpeakerBox continue to attend a series of event events like coffee mornings etc to bridge the gap
- Also running a creative group and choir that young people were actively involved in
- The young people that are involved in the choir have had an opportunity to perform on stage to perform
- SpeakerBox held their Winter Ball last year and a celebratory event on 25 October 2022 where 60 people attended the event. The young people who were present shared their experiences about the successful celebratory event.

Dechaun relayed feedback to the committee about what the young people had highlighted which were following:

- Continued support to young members of SpeakerBox
- Employment opportunities
- Develop total respect and training opportunities to allow the upskilling of young people
- *"I am..." Campaign film launch* held on 11 April 2023, between 2.00pm – 4.30pm at South London Gallery, 65 Peckham Rd, SE5 (further information provided by Dechaun after the meeting)
- Drama performance
- Showcasing show last summer
- Organised auction – sold items, to fund raise to develop a new SpeakerBox website
- An event – *"I belong here ..."* is a voice of young people for fostering was mentioned at the meeting.
- The young people took part in the 2030 conversations which was well attended and noted advocacy, housing and complaints were matters that needed to be resolved.

SpeakerBox - Plans for 2023

- The council had recruited a second children's rights and participation officer
- The continued partnership with the virtual school
- Learn new skills, shares cultures outreach work – especially for the young people in custody
- More opportunities for training for employment for professional positions

- Provide positive spaces to thrive together.

The chair thanked the young speakers and Dechaun for his verbal update. She agreed to provide House of Commons shop gifts for the above event as part of the auction.

7. HOUSING FOR CARE LEAVERS

Cheryl Russell, director of resident services, presented information about housing for care leavers.

The officer provided data on social housing and spoke about policy work relating to the involving which concerning the housing register and homelessness.

It also includes:

- Working with children's services about housing options, dealing mainly with rough sleepers and homelessness
- The various processes include going through the register, where care leavers are categorised as band 2; a second priority housing need which mean being housed with expediency. Due to the current housing crisis in London – this has created a huge challenge with 17,000 on the housing register with only around 800 housing stock available
- Social housing team generally work with those that were in most urgent need
- 106 care leavers were registered in Band 2
- Between November 2021 to October 2022, 66 care leavers were housed in a council flat or housing association that were mostly studio accommodation as studio flats were not being built. These were one bed properties
- The officer explained a number of social homes through the letting scheme had diminished and mentioned the added pressure to develop new builds at the required level that was needed
- The officer referred to ongoing discussions relating to the care leavers group.

Pan London Care Leavers Compact:

Reference in the officer's report and issues highlighted at the meeting

- London Council's Housing Directors and Heads of Housing Needs have entered conversation with the Association of London Directors of Children's Services and the London Innovation and Improvement Alliance about the housing elements of a proposed Pan London Compact.

- The purpose of the compact would be to create a common agreed offer on a number of fronts from London authorities. The Housing elements focus:
 - Council tax exemption (not a housing area in Southwark)
 - Intentional homelessness exemption
 - Automatic priority need decision up to 25
 - Access to rent deposit schemes
 - Joint housing and children's services protocols in place.

The deposit scheme for care leavers – difficult to sustain especially if young people are not in full-time employment and their housing benefit would not be sufficient to cover the rent.

Presentation:

Karen Shaw, head of housing solutions presented this segment:

- Local housing allowance had not changed or been revised since 2020 and the housing allowance falls within discretionary payments
- Difficulty finding emergency housing accommodation for care leavers
- Measured on targets – to provide homes for care leavers in the borough
- The ongoing challenges to get care leavers in suitable accommodation
- Care leavers that are placed outside the borough could be isolated or experience mental health issues especially if they had no family links or connection to the area
- Care leavers living out of the borough – should still receive the same level of support.

Note:

The chair proposed that the housing cabinet member, care leavers' officers and director, children and families, develop an action plan on housing for care leavers. This shall be listed for discussion at the committee on 19 April 2023 to address.

RESOLVED:

That the data on care leavers, proposed policy developments, and comments regarding the housing elements of the proposed London care leavers compact as presented and outlined in the report be noted.

8. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS (IRO) ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

Summary:

- The report contained a summary of work completed by Southwark's IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer) service for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022
- It identified the work of the service in fulfilling its statutory remit and highlighted areas for development in relation to the IRO function
- It was reported that a permanent assistant director was now in place and the proposal was also to appoint a 1.5 IRO officer
- A number of young people were consulted in terms of their care plan
- The social care team did a lot of work in ensuring issues were not escalated
- The work of the IROs was to improve the outcome for children and young people in care – it also meant providing a lot of training in regards to a young person's care plan
- The council's children and families directorate involves working closely with all relevant stakeholders and partners across the sector
- IRO officers: An IRO officer recently recruited would be working around advocacy to meet the needs of young people. This includes 'hard to reach' groups, those with disabilities and young people that were in custody.

RESOLVED:

That the Independent Review Officers (IRO) Annual report 2021-22 be noted.

9. CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVER SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY 2023-2026

Suzanne Green, programme lead officer, and Genette Laws, director of commissioning, presented this item.

Summary:

The report outlined: That the council has a duty under the Children Act 1989 (Section 22) to provide sufficient placements within the local authority's area, so far as is reasonably practical, to meet the accommodation needs of our children looked after and care leavers.

- Children between the ages from 10 years and above; 60 percent are from black and ethnic minority groups and a majority were asylum seekers
- The care leavers (60 percent ratio) were in residential care and lived within a 20-mile radius away in accordance with the government guidelines
- There was a reported number of children who were placed in residential care
- The aim was to increase the number of adoptive families and improve the efficiency of the strategy.

The officers responded to questions concerning:

- Information about the special educational needs budget
- 16 plus regulation, commission alliance which involved an accreditation team on the type of support they could offer in regard to residential provision
- The number of black children waiting for adoption.

Alasdair Smith, director, children & families, children's and adults' services agreed to present data to the committee, on the disparity of children based on their ethnicity particularly black and white children – that could be addressed through “Adopt London”.

Action:

Noted the committee’s work plan and for officers to provide more detail on the proportionality and what further work could be done, to engage with black led organisations in the area which included early intervention of black looked after children and care leavers.

RESOLVED

- That the children in care and care leavers placement sufficiency strategy set out in Appendix 1 be noted.
- That comments concerning the children in care and care leavers placement sufficiency strategy be noted.

10. OFSTED REPORT UPDATE FOR COMMITTEE

Alasdair Smith, director, children & families, children's and adults' services provided an update on Southwark’s Ofsted report. He gave a quote from Ofsted which was, “Southwark is a special council”

It was noted that Ofsted met with a number of young people from the borough.

Summary of points highlighted in the Ofsted report:

- Adoption was regarded as strong
- Live story work needed further development
- Fostering recruitment needed further improvement
- Foster carers should be given more training opportunities
- Relaunch of the care service
- Challenges facing permanent foster carers

The chair welcomed the points raised by Ofsted.

11. CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE WORKPLAN 2023-24

RESOLVED:

1. That the workplan as set out in the report be subject to review and agreement with the chair and director of children's services.
2. That the committee reviewed and identified housing for care leavers, as an item for the April committee meeting, as noted in the work plan.

The meeting ended at 4.25pm.

CHAIR:

DATED: