



CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on Wednesday 22 October 2025 at 2.00 pm at the Council Offices, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Jasmine Ali (Chair)
Councillor Natasha Ennin
Councillor Emily Hickson
Councillor Maria Linforth-Hall

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor John Batteson
Dr Mark Kerr (subject matter expert)

OFFICER SUPPORT: Helen Woolgar, Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Care
Elaine Reid, Head of Service: Permanence and Resources
Daisy May-James, Permanence Lead Service Manager
Joy Edwards, Designated Nurse for Looked after Children
Joy Hopkinson, Head of Safeguarding & Community Services, Governance and Assurance (legal)
Usha Singh, Virtual Head Teacher
Sophie James, Team Manager Fostering and colleagues from team
Poppy Laurens, Service Development Officer
Jackie Young, Social Worker
Ekta Gupta, Children Rights and Participation
Representatives of Speakerbox
Kenny and Rosamund, Foster Carers
Paula Thornton, Constitutional Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Charlie Smith and Mohamed Deen.

Dr Jenny Taylor, consultant clinical psychologist and Dr Stacey Legere-

Smith, designated doctor for looked after children also submitted their apologies.

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

The chair gave notice of the following late item:

- Item 9. Fostering annual report 2024-25.

Reasons for urgency and lateness will be specified in the relevant minutes.

4. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

There were none.

5. MINUTES

Actions arising:

Southwark Homes for Children. Noted the request that the council would write formally to central government, detailing the points that were raised at the committee meeting on 16 July 2025 to be actioned.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2025 were approved as a correct record and signed by the chair.

6. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR FOR THE CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE 2025-26

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Charlie Smith be elected vice-chair for the corporate parenting committee for 2025-26.

7. SPEAKERBOX VERBAL UPDATE AND REPORT BACK ON ACTIONS

Speakerbox provided an update to the corporate parenting committee on key activities and priorities.

The focus was to empower young people and give them a voice and identify barriers in the system to this happening.

Education

The challenges of secondary school for young people and pressures of academic demands, against the possible instability in a home and care situation which may impact consistency and guidance throughout the various stages of education.

Quote from one of the young people “We don’t get a built-in map to help navigate these challenges.”

Mentorship

The importance of having someone within the school environment for the young person to understand their challenges and have their best interests at heart and to also support their wellbeing. The importance of consistent and positive role models that young people can relate to was emphasised.

One of the representatives of Speakerbox was able to outline the support that she had received from a mentor from the Kings Trust who helped her navigate her path towards university, also providing support and help for her brother. Their support was invaluable by having someone to regularly check in on progress and provide helpful guidance.

Speakerbox proposal

Speakerbox presented an outline of their proposal to the committee which addresses:

- Progress and review
- Outcomes and reflection and
- Feedback on success of project.

Moving forward

- Meetings accessibility

- Agreed plan of actions
- Comments and reflection

Comments arising from presentation:

- Noted different types of mentors and the need for them at the different stages of the child and young person's life
- Reference to peer mentorship and how effective this can be
- Acknowledged key that a young person has someone they confide in and talk which may be a combination of professional and peer support mentors.
- Query on PEP (personal education plan) form and if addresses mentorship/support. Confirmed that there is a section within the form on careers, but officers can work with Speakerbox to ensure collaborate with the relevant support / mentorship needed. Comment made that this is needed before 16.

The committee were also able to give feedback of the transformational impact of mentors within their life and how this directed and shaped their paths and opportunities in life. Also commented, about the importance to give safe spaces for young people to talk.

8. ANNUAL VIRTUAL HEADTEACHER'S REPORT 2024-2025

Usha Singh, virtual headteacher outlined the main points and issues arising from the annual report 2024-25.

Usha explained the training and support that was being given to teachers to ensure that the correct coding for recording absence was used, so that the figures were accurate and provided a true reflection of the absenteeism.

The intense and focused work undertaken the virtual school on absenteeism and exclusions / suspensions was explained to the committee and examples given to provide context.

Examples of activities outside the school environment were give including a trip Sadler Wells theatre to see "Luna" and the Unicorn Theatre to see "There is a bear in my chair".

An impressive number (68) students also attended summer tuition.

Summary of issues / questions raised:

- A councillor raised a query relating to the exclusion of a young person due to non-attendance that was attributable to ill health. Details of the case to be passed to the relevant officer / cabinet member
- Query to reason for increase in lack of attendance of girls, which was partly explained in the context of a national trend and use of social media quoted as an example of a possible factor
- Reference to the impending “Staying Close” legislation and impact on key stage 5 placements out of borough
- Absenteeism in exam period and question relating to support for the children/young people to help with the anxiety and stress arising. It was explained that support is provided including officers within the team that are trained to provide this support.

RESOLVED:

1. That virtual headteacher’s report for Southwark Looked After Children be noted.
2. That the next committee receive a report back on exclusions.

9. FOSTER ANNUAL REPORT

It was not possible to circulate this report five clear days in advance of the meeting as the content required finalisation to ensure accuracy and completeness. The fostering annual report included detailed performance data, service developments, and strategic updates which needed to be reviewed and amended prior to publication. The delay was necessary to ensure the report reflected the most current and correct information for consideration by the corporate parenting committee and the chair agreed to accept the item as urgent on this basis.

The fostering team were present to present the annual report to committee members.

Additionally, foster carers were also present to provide details of their work with children and the support provided to enable them to undertake their role.

In terms of recruitment, the team talked about the efforts and initiatives being undertaken on all levels to promote recruitment including attending the Lambeth country show, working with and

building relationships with the community. It was explained that social media does not always convert to numbers of foster carers coming forward and various initiatives have been undertaken including the use of respite foster carers which helps to provide an avenue into foster care. Such initiatives can provide diversity for the cohort and a means for carers to become foster carers on a long-term basis.

Summary of points raised by the foster carers who attended the meeting:

- Great experience of support provided by the foster carers team and the provision of in-depth training
- Experience of dealing with fostering children in crisis and also being provided with support from the team to deal with any trauma / difficulties arising.

Queries / issues arising from presentation:

- Life story books use and providing guidance for carers to complete
- Concern about the recruitment levels, set against the likely retirement figures of current group of foster parents
- Query about whether increased money for foster parents would make a difference on recruitment but it was explained that the 24/7 support provided for carers was shown to be an invaluable resource and helps retain carers
- Reference to 'connected carers' and use of other settings like the school to connect young people with carers in this setting. Joy Edwards also referred to the use of the resource of hospitals (use of doctors and other health professionals who may be interested in providing care).
- Officers explained that the primary focus always should be to maintain relationships with the families and foster care is not seen as a permanent care solution.

RESOLVED:

1. That the annual report of Southwark Fostering Service for 2024-25 be noted.
2. That the committee receives a report to the next meeting on foster care recruitment (including communication strategy) including retirement of foster carers from the current cohort.

10. CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY UPDATE 2026 - 2030 UPDATE

This item was deferred until the next meeting of the corporate parenting committee.

11. CORPORATE PARENTING SUBSTANCE MISUSE REPORT

This item was deferred until the next meeting of the corporate parenting committee.

12. EMPLOYABILITY PATHWAY UPDATE

Poppy Laurens, service development officer presented this update report to committee to provide progress since July 2025.

Councillor John Batteson (cabinet member for climate emergency, jobs and business) was also present for this item and was able to confirm a commitment of funding and to advise that the priorities had increased the numbers of young people working. Personalised support can be provided to young people, and success had been achieved in opening up opportunities in the council and civil service.

The issue of some care leavers not securing an automatic interview as part of the council's recruitment was raised. However, it was explained that the automatic interview was only granted when essential criteria were met. The idea was raised that in the case of an interview not being granted it would be useful to give the care leaver feedback and support to move forward / support to get the necessary qualification or experience needed.

RESOLVED:

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That officers investigate the points raised and follow-up action for the care leaver if not granted an interview as part of the council's recruitment (suggested action to provide feedback and support to gain necessary qualification/experience).

13. CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE - WORKPLAN

RESOLVED:

1. That the work plan be noted.
2. That the draft agenda for the February be noted as follows:
 - Substance misuse report (deferred from 22 October meeting)
 - Corporate parenting strategy (deferred from 22 October meeting)
 - Report on exclusions and suspensions data and addressing concern raised about the increased absenteeism of girls arising from the annual headteacher report to committee 22 October 2025
 - Fostering recruitment and invite communications team (arising from 22 October meeting)
 - Annual independent reviewing officer report
 - Adoption annual report and
 - Southwark homes for Southwark children update.

The meeting ended at 4.45pm.

CHAIR:

DATED: