



Corporate Parenting Committee

MINUTES of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on Wednesday 22 April 2026 at 5.00 pm at the Council Offices, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Jasmine Ali (Chair)
Councillor Charlie Smith
Councillor Emily Hickson

OFFICER SUPPORT: Alasdair Smith, Director of Children's Services
Helen Woolgar, Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Care
Elaine Reid, Head of Service: Permanence and Resources
Jenny Taylor, Head of Clinical Service
Joy Edwards, Designated Nurse for Looked after Children
Dr Stacy John-Legere, Designated Doctor for Looked after Children
Sadie Dann, Policy Officer, Children and Adults
Kathleen Salawu, Social Worker
Sheherazade Aanchawan, Team Manager
Joy Hopkinson, Head of Safeguarding & Community Services, Governance and Assurance (legal)
Usha Singh, Virtual Head Teacher
Alice Beresford, Deputy Head of the Virtual School
Oyeyinka Olaniran, Head of Quality Assurance & Workforce Development
Poppy Laurens, Service Development Officer
Ekta Gupta, Children Rights and Participation Officer
Representatives of Speakerbox
Paula Thornton, Constitutional Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Dr. Mark Kerr, Councillors Sarah King and Maria Linforth-Hall.

2. CONFIRMATION OF VOTING MEMBERS

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

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

There were none.

4. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

There were none.

5. MINUTES

Subject to a correction of Dr Stacy John-Legere name on the minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 February 2026 be approved as a correct record and signed by the chair.

6. SPEAKERBOX VERBAL UPDATE

Speakerbox provided an update to the committee on several initiatives and work being undertaken as follows:

Foster care training

An opportunity had been provided to take part in existing training so that the young people could provide their observations and influence the training. For example, an observation about the use of language was made in by the young people in the training session and outlining the importance of showing young people in a positive light through the use of language/words. Additionally, comments were provided to request that realistic expectations were created in respect of what fostering means and the challenges ahead should be included as part of the training.

Education and employment

A meeting had taken place with the virtual school discussing the detail about mentoring and ways to improve and how this could be expanded in education (including training for teachers and support for this role). Further discussions were planned with the virtual school and how Speakerbox could fit into this role of

improvement and further development of mentorship.

Also discussed was the issue of safeguarding and to increase awareness of subtle signs with the hope of providing training in June/July.

Residential visit to St James Farm

Speakerbox highlighted another successful and enjoyable visit for the under 13s to St James Farm. The trip provided a safe place for young people to develop their confidence and positive relationships with other children through discussion and team activities.

Finance guidance document

The committee were impressed to see the work undertaken by Speakerbox to produce and design a finance guidance document to provide a clear understanding for young people. It helps manage their expectations and reduce some of the stress in this area that can arise on finance in their relationships.

Noted that the grant for this work coming to an end soon.

Moving forward

Key aims include:

- A visit to be arranged for approximately 10 young people to visit Houses of Parliament
- The finance document
- Future vision and how young people have can an impact and ensure their voices are represented and heard to ensure their input.

Discussion arising:

- The chair to look into what can be done to ensure the visit to Parliament goes ahead
- Acknowledged the need to receive the input of young people, but important to ensure that this is focused
- Discussion on the mentor topic that has been highlighted previously at the committee and understanding the capacity issues
- The virtual head explained that the designated teacher is a statutory role which is set out in guidance. To highlight the role of mentors, plans to meet with designated teachers to highlight and develop
- A discussion took place regarding the recent trip to St James Farm and the importance of ensuring that all children who wish to attend are able to do so. It was noted that there were capacity issues, however, it was suggested that communication around attendance and allocation of places could be reviewed to help manage expectations and inclusion.

- It was also confirmed that funding has been secured for the 2027 visit to the farm.
- Noted the 'oustanding' newsletter of Speakerbox
- Paula Thornton to send details of the new membership of the committee once agreed at annual council so that Speakerbox can invite members to a meeting in advance of the next meeting of the committee in July.
- Committee pleased to hear contact made by local MP to provide paid and seasonal work to young people for job experience.

MOTION OF ADJOURNMENT

At 5.50pm it was moved, seconded and

RESOLVED:

That the meeting stand adjourned for 20 minutes.

The meeting reconvened at 6.10pm.

7. VIRTUAL SCHOOL SUSPENSION, EXCLUSION AND PERSISTENT ABSENCE OF GIRLS REPORT - ARISING FROM THE ANNUAL HEADTEACHER REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE 22 OCTOBER 2025

Usha Singh, virtual school head presented the report to the committee highlighting key areas. The detail and slides were contained within the published papers for the committee.

The presentation demonstrated the extent of the collaborative work that the virtual school undertakes with the schools to obtain the best outcome for children and young people who have been suspended / excluded. This has resulted in a reduction on the final figures and statistics presented and positive outcomes for the children and young people through the stability provided by remaining in their school.

It was identified that historically behaviour policies have been directed towards boys and the policies have not changed so it is important to note that these policies are developed to address all relevant issues, including mental health.

The virtual head outlined measures undertaken to address persistent absenteeism, including the use of pupil premium.

Discussion arising:

- Noted that historically public policy has focused on young men and the chair expressed her thanks to the virtual school for their work undertaken in respect

of suspension and permanent exclusions

- Query about pupil referral units. She explained that the primary focus is to retain stability. Explained that these units have an Ofsted rating and that discussions would take place with other virtual heads, depending on the area of the placement when last resort measures have to be considered but the key emphasis is to retain stability.

RESOLVED:

1. That the virtual school suspension, exclusion and persistent absence of girls' report - arising from the Annual Headteacher report to corporate parenting committee on 22 October 2025 be noted, with any feedback any comments for consideration by the virtual school headteacher.
2. That ethnicity data presented in the virtual school report and other reports, should in future include the ethnic category for Latino. It was noted that the category is not currently within the Department of Education ethnic breakdown which is something that Southwark can add as an additional category.
3. That Speakerbox work with the virtual school to include experiences of young people and their voice in work on suspensions, exclusions and absences.

8. KINSHIP LOCAL OFFER DEVELOPMENTS AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Officers presented an overview of the kinship offer for Southwark, one of the first to have a published and enhanced offer.

In addition, to the summary of the report the following issues were also identified:

- Therapeutic care
- Help with legal advice
- Virtual school links
- Ofsted extending census to include return to kinship so schools have a better understanding of children and young people
- Support group meets every two weeks and coffee morning for carers
- Celebration events and work around increasing reach and numbers of kinship carers
- Looking at developing a newsletter built on the model of the Speakerbox news letter to be rolled out in June 2026
- Support group offer
- Enhanced postal offer and final broader offer made and ensure at least a check and call for the carers.

Summary of discussion

Dr Stacy John-Legere offered to provide support to kinship carers on autism and

neurodiverse children and young people and how this presents.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of this report and the overarching developments and implementation plan be noted.

9. CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY 2026-2030 - UPDATE

Helen Woolgar (deputy director, safeguarding and care) and Poppy Laurens (service development officer) presented the report to the committee.

It was confirmed that Brightspots were presenting findings of recent work to young people next week based on the eight pillars and work will begin to develop the corporate parenting strategy.

Officers confirmed the intention to work with teams across the council and the leadership network.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report and timeline for the delivery of the new corporate parenting strategy 2026-2030 be noted.

10. CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE WORKPLAN 2026-27

RESOLVED:

That the workplan be agreed.

11. VERBAL UPDATE ON THE KENT MENINGITIS OUTBREAK

Dr Stacy John-Legere provided an update to the committee arising from the recent Kent meningitis outbreak. She confirmed that all vaccination records had been checked and those contacted who had outstanding immunisations.

The meeting ended at 7.15pm.

CHAIR:

DATED: