

## Corporate Parenting Committee

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on Wednesday 3 November 2021 at 2.00 pm at Ground floor meeting room, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

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**PRESENT:** Councillor Charlie Smith (Vice-Chair) chair for the meeting  
Councillor Maggie Browning  
Councillor Sunny Lambe  
Councillor Sunil Chopra

**NON-VOTING  
COOPTED  
MEMBERS:** Tracey Harrison, Critical friend of the local community  
Rosamond Marshall, Foster Carer

**OFFICER  
SUPPORT:** Alasdair Smith, Director of Children and Families  
Andrew Fowler, Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers  
Steve Chaplin, Service Manager, Children's and Adults' Services  
Helen Woolgar, Assistant Director – Safeguarding & Care  
Dr Jenny Taylor, Head of Clinical Service, Children's and Adults' Services  
Dr Stacy John-Legere, Designated Doctor for Looked after Children  
Karen Neil, Head of Service Quality Assurance and Practice Development  
Leval Haughton-James, Interim Children's Rights Officer  
Young People from Speakerbox  
Adam Marlin, Virtual School for Looked After Children  
Daisy May-James, Team Manager, Fostering Team, Children's and Adults' Services  
Asanti Khm-Sankofa, Social Worker, Fostering Team, Children's and Adults' Services  
Paula Thornton and Beverley Olamijulo, Constitutional Team  
Poonam Patel, Departmental Coordinator, Children's and

Adults' Services  
Rosemary Frimpong, Children's and Adults Services  
Melanie Aarons Royal, Experienced Practitioner  
Education, Employment and Training  
Graham, Foster Carer.

## 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from:

- Councillors Jasmine Ali, Evelyn Akoto, Stephanie Cryan and Eliza Mann.
- Michele Sault, Dr. Sue Goode and Dr. Mark Kerr.

## 2. CONFIRMATION OF VOTING MEMBERS

The members listed as presented 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

There were none.

## 5. MINUTES

### RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the chair subject to the following amendment:

**Item 7: Corporate Parenting Strategy – 2021-2024.** Minutes incorrectly stated that the strategy was signed off by cabinet. It was agreed that the minutes be approved subject to the correction being made.

## 6. EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT WORKSHOP

The education and employment workshop (16+ Leaving Care Service) opened with a presentation, which highlighted the following points:

- What Southwark has in place for its care leavers
- What is in the local offer for care leavers

- Data in care leavers aged 19-21 at the end of the quarter in education, employment or training across local councils in London Borough of Southwark
- Findings of the data
- Education/employment 16 – 18 The Virtual School Key Stage 5
- Attainment levels/outcome analysis
- Headline education, employment and training figures for the academic year 2020-21
- Identification of the needs of care leavers
- Case study of Owolabi and his outstanding educational and voluntary work achievements and winning Southwark Young Citizen of the Year 2021
- Key messages from care leavers and what they think.

The action plan set out seven points of identified action as follows:

- 1. Wellbeing**
- 2. Champions**
- 3. Paid internships and work experience**
- 4. Apprenticeships**
- 5. Guaranteed shortlisting/interview Scheme**
- 6. Mentors**
- 7. A safe, stable, affordable home**

The committee also received input from the Adam Marlin, Virtual School for Looked After Children who highlighted the following points:

- Alternative provision and increased pastoral support
- Specialist provision for young people with learning difficulties
- Attainment levels and outcome
- Home tuition (limited budget)
- Weekly not in education, employment and training clinic
- Education, employment and training action plan with a chronology of all opportunities with timescales
- Issue of unaccompanied asylum seeking minors, which is at a high level currently.

Melanie Aarons Royal an experienced practitioner education, employment and training also provided some information to the committee addressing the needs of care levels in often difficult circumstances and issues relating to housing, training and support for when in employment (clothing, assistance with transport costs and so on) to support care leavers in their jobs.

Leval Haughton-James, children's rights officer was in attendance with young people from Speakerbox who provided further valuable contributions to this workshop.

One of the young people was able to advise that she had earlier in the day attended an interview for a civil service internship. The pandemic had impacted her goals but in addition to this interview was in the process of attending other interviews and exploring other opportunities. She outlined some of the challenges facing young care leavers relate to stability and housing and the support often required.

Issues/queries raised in response to the presentation and contributions:

- Concern that young people with special needs (mental health in particular) were given the appropriate support and the need for confidence building exercises which might include group discussions with young people with similar challenges so that they can learn from each other, boost morale and confidence. Officers agreed to look into this suggestion.
- Query as to why care leavers cannot currently bid for a one bedroom flat. It was explained that probably would result in a reluctance for young care leavers to bid for the bedsit option. Mentioned about the possibility of supporting care leavers and their friends' in house shares. Officers explained that all options would be examined and there was a clear plan from the beginning for young care leavers, including the use of private landlord tenure with an offer of advanced rent payments and other support available
- Query on 16 – 18 supported housing on Denmark Hill and how long the young people can remain at this accommodation. Officers explained that the placements were reviewed with partners/providers and there was also a clear package of support and options available for the young people from the beginning. Some of the young people if awaiting asylum clarification may require a longer stay until their legal status confirmed
- New housing provision policy and ensuring that an element of support was built into this provision for care leavers.
- The committee extended their congratulations to the young people in attendance at the committee and Owolabi (case study as part of their presentation) for their outstanding achievements
- Reference to the ethnicity data and young white care leavers' data. Officers explained that regular meetings of a panel take place to monitor and address any gaps. Young people are also part of this panel and are able to explain their own direct experience to help inform the clinical partners and officers
- The director of children and families explained that a planned briefing was taking place with cabinet members Councillors Jasmine Ali and Stephanie Cryan to discussion the issue of new support and barriers in respect of housing for young care leavers
- Councillor Charlie Smith raised the issue of contacts with employers in the borough mentioning the Timpson shoe repair business as an example and contacts that could be made to support and encourage care leavers in

employment/apprenticeships. As well as the larger employers in the borough, small and medium sized enterprises/employers also mentioned for providing opportunities for young care leavers

- Support for young people in internships.

Officers identified seven key points on the action plan as follows, with the suggestion that these each be allocated to members of the corporate parenting committee:

1. Wellbeing
2. Champions
3. Paid internships and work experience
4. Apprenticeships
5. Guaranteed shortlisting/interview Scheme
6. Mentors
7. A safe, stable, affordable home.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That Councillor Charlie Smith discuss the suggestion of the allocation of action plan themes to members of the committee (identified above) with Councillor Jasmine Ali (chair of the corporate parenting committee).

#### **7. FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021**

The council's assistant director - safeguarding and care introduced the annual fostering service annual report referencing the massive impact of Covid-19 at all levels to the service (staff and foster carers).

The committee heard from the fostering team explaining how they adapted to the pandemic and the rollout of zoom online training for foster carers, which was fully embraced and welcomed by foster carers.

Additionally, the committee heard from two foster carers who talked about their experiences. Key points raised are set out below:

- Tried to plan many fun activities with the home and use of garden (where available)
- Issue of one foster care family just having one toilet in the home. Investigations had been undertaken previously with housing association which unfortunately were not successful in increasing this provision to an extra toilet for the family
- Dealing with religious requirements and ensuring all the relevant provisions were made at home when not possible for the young people to visit places of worship in the height of the pandemic
- Coping with foster children not being able to see their friends in lock down and seeking the help and support when necessary from the fostering team. Foster carers felt supported by the team at this difficult time

- A single man talked about his experiences as a new foster carer starting at the time of the pandemic, feeling that the placement had gone extremely well. Raised the issue of accommodation. He lived in a privately owned two bedroom flat and the need in the future to keep the room for his foster son if attending university for example (which in turn may limit his ability for other fostering). Officers explained the support and package in place to support the foster son being continue to return to his foster home in holiday periods and when not at university in the future (staying put policy).
- Experiences of medical treatment in the pandemic and the understandable trauma experienced by foster parents in not being allowed to stay with their children when being treated at hospital (for example) but did comment that the doctor in this instance kept the foster parent fully informed via mobile phone throughout the treatment process.

Summary of issues/discussion arising:

- Issue of housing allocations and aids/adaption discussed and the importance of this towards the stability of the placement. Officers explained the challenges relating to adaptations to properties and gave examples when this had been undertaken to secure the longer term needs of some foster placements
- In light the contribution from one of the foster carers a query was raised in respect of creative advertising to encourage single men to foster.

**RESOLVED:**

That the annual report of Southwark Fostering Service be noted.

**8. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS (IRO) ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21**

The interim head of service, quality assurance and practice development introduced the independent reviewing officers annual report for 2020-21 outlining key issues arising.

Summary of issues/discussions arising:

- Query relating to the numbers of children in care and data within the report. Officers explained that there had been a significant increase in the last three months arising from unaccompanied minors
- Caseloads and the numbers as set out in the report. The officer responded that this was reasonable and the numbers governed by statute to ensure cases are managed and reviewed without excessive case loads
- Recruitment of black males within the service.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Independent Review Officers (IRO) annual report be noted.

## **9. SELF-EVALUATION OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE WITH CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS**

The director of children and families presented the report and highlighted a number of key areas as follows:

- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children figures
- More children are being fostered with family members and supported to enable
- Proud of the development of the children in care service and striving to always achieve more
- Making Southwark a great place to work to attract relevant staff for the service.

Summary of issues/discussions arising:

- A query was raised with regard to the employment of staff and budget restrictions. It was confirmed that efforts are made to ensure an understanding of the requirements of the service and the fact that continuing investment is also required for this statutory provision as part of the budget challenge process
- Congratulatory /Christmas cards raised. Suggested the possibility of the chair and vice-chair signing the cards and officers can address/distribute. Officer to explore if possible.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the self-evaluation of social work practice for children in care and care leavers June 2021 be noted.

## **10. CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE - WORK PLAN 2021-22**

### **RESOLVED:**

1. That the work plan as set out in the report be noted.
2. That the committee receive a report at its next meeting on unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people.
3. That the following be added to the work plan for the committee "update on the pandemic and impact on young people".

The meeting ended at 4.20 pm.

**CHAIR:**

**DATED:**