

Corporate Parenting Committee

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on Wednesday 2 March 2022 at 2.00 pm at Ground floor meeting room, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Jasmine Ali (Chair)
Councillor Charlie Smith (Vice=Chair)
Councillor Evelyn Akoto
Councillor Stephanie Cryan
Councillor Sunny Lambe

NON-VOTING MEMBERS: Dr Mark Kerr (co-opted member)

OFFICER SUPPORT: Alasdair Smith, Director of Children and Families
Andrew Fowler, Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers
Helen Woolgar, Assistant Director – Safeguarding and Care
Elaine Reid, Head of Service, Permanence and Resources
James Hanley, Senior Clinical Practitioner, Children's and Adults' Services
Lukman Ahmed, Team Manager Children's and Adults Services
Leval Haughton-James, Children's Rights Officer
Roberto Gouveia, Social Worker
Khalida Khan, Interim Service Manager, LCS 16 plus Service
Ian Lewis, National Children's Services Advisor for Child Mental Health (NHS England)
Paula Thornton and Beverley Olamijulo, Constitutional Team
Poonam Patel, Departmental Coordinator, Children's and Adults Services

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Maggie Browning and Eliza Mann

Dr Stacy John-Legere and Michele Sault.

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

There were none.

5. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the chair.

6. REPORT AND WORKSHOP ON UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM SEEKING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Care leaver workshop – the experience of semi-independent accommodation

The chair presented the item and highlighted following discussion from the previous meeting, herself and officers a visit took place with the foster carers that look after young asylum seekers. She spoke about the challenges young asylum seekers face.

The committee welcomed the three young people who were asylum seekers. The representatives/interpreters who accompanied the young people thanked members for inviting them to the meeting.

The young people that had come into care spoke about their experiences – through an interpreter:

First young person (Mohamed) explained he was studying at Southwark College and enjoyed meeting his friends and interacting with his teachers.

Second young person (Samir) spoke about some of the challenges, learning English as a new language was one of them. He emphasised that he liked to keep himself clean and tidy and ensures that he was not late for college.

Third young person (Bensham) said he studied English level I and said he would like to train as a doctor.

The chair explained her role to the young people and the role of councillors present at the meeting. She referred to all the decisions taken on children in care and asked the young people if there was anything, the councillors could do better.

Members noted that one of the children in care explained he lived with a family (foster home) and enjoyed being part of that environment. He highlighted a friend of his lived in a shared house that had experienced some difficulties living there, which was why he prefers living with a family. The key workers help the young people in care with their homework and are generally supportive. The young person said he gets help and advice on how to cook and clean – being semi-independent because he lived in a studio flat.

One young person's experience after entering the country was within a short time he was able to meet other young people who were of Kurdish origin, his social worker (Roberto) found a mosque and prayer book – and also linked him to other Kurdish young people.

The young people present raised concern about their allowance for food and other essentials, which they felt was a small amount (£55) to live on – e.g. not sufficient to buy clothes.

Other issues highlighted:

- The young people spoke about what they aspired to be – which was to be a doctor, civil engineer and IT consultant. The committee applauded them for this.
- The committee noted that when young people turn eighteen they become care leavers and continue to be fully supported, with their education and studies.
- The other issue of concern for the young people related to the age related assessment process for asylum seeking children undertaken by the home office; the view was that it created uncertainty, while their application was processed.

- The chair addressed her comments to the young people stating that the council and committee would continue to fight for asylum seekers. The chair thanked the supporters and social workers for the amazing work they do.

- **Action**

Members agreed that as a committee a letter should be drafted and sent to the Home Office about the delay and waiting time for the application and assessment of young asylum seekers, which was evidence based from the social work team.

Andrew Fowler, head of service children in care and care leavers (sixteen plus) presented information about age assessment /or when a young person's age had not been determined. This usually would be the responsibility of a social worker.

The committee discussed:

- The numbers of UASC at 31 March Looked After by Southwark and figures in January 2022
- The bar chart which illustrated the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children presented each month since April 2021
- The dramatic rise in the numbers over the second half of 2021
- How many unaccompanied asylum seeking care leavers there are in Southwark
- The committee were informed about the importance of triple planning for unaccompanied asylum seeking children – which involves three possible outcomes that relate to the young person's immigration status
- Provide support to the young person (even past their 18th birthday), if they receive leave to remain in the UK
- Prepare and support the young person when their application to remain in the UK was not granted; or if they voluntarily return to their country of origin
- Identify the support available to young people that were refused leave to remain in the UK.

The Kent Intake Unit – age assessment of young people by Home Office appoint social workers to assess whether unaccompanied asylum seeking children were either children or adults.

In June 2021, the Home Office informed the council that up to 800 beds were

reserved in Southwark hotels as initial accommodation centres for asylum seeking adults and families.

Since June 2021 there were 44 people placed in hotel accommodation.

Other issues raised related to exploitation, trafficking and modern slavery were discussed.

Ian Lewis, National Children's Services Advisor for Child Mental Health (NHS England) addressed the committee about migration and distribution of looked after children and statistical comparison with other councils. Issues concerning commissioning housing for some young people, and addressing matters with the Home Office to provide good quality care were discussed.

The chair thanked representatives and the young people for their attendance.

7. ANNUAL REPORT ON HEALTH OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The above item was deferred, until the next meeting because the designated doctor for looked after children and designated nurse for looked after children, were unable to attend the meeting.

8. CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE - WORKPLAN 2021 - 2022

RESOLVED:

That approach and work plan as set out in the report be agreed.

The meeting ended at 4.10 pm

CHAIR:

DATED: