



CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on Wednesday 25 February 2026 at 2.00 pm at the Council Offices, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Jasmine Ali (Chair)
Councillor Natasha Ennin

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: 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
Audrey Bouazizi, Head of Service Adopt London South
Jenny Taylor, Head of Clinical Service
Joy Edwards, Designated Nurse for Looked after Children
Dr Stacy John-Legere, Designated Doctor for Looked after Children
Clare Ryan, Service Manager, Looked after Children
Joy Hopkinson, Head of Safeguarding & Community Services, Governance and Assurance (legal)
Usha Singh, Virtual Head Teacher
Alice Beresford, Deputy Head of the Virtual School
Sarah O'Connor, Designated Nurse for Looked after Children
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 Councillors Charlie Smith, Maria Linforth-Hall and Emily Hickson.

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

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the chair.

6. SPEAKERBOX VERBAL UPDATE AND REPORT ON ACTIONS

Speakerbox provided an update to committee on key work and priorities. Advised that out of the eight pillars of priorities and the focus that has been directed towards the following two areas:

Education and employment

Summary of key issues:

- Have requested mentorship before exams and a meeting planned with head of service, permanence and resources
- Work of the young inspectors with colleagues who undertake training and their involvement in the process
- A representative of Speakerbox spoke of the work undertaken with the parks service in Southwark and their involvement of

- children and young people
- Voices in education and special needs.

Standards and treatment in care

- Speakerbox representative explained work being undertaken with foster care training and their involvement.

Discussion summary

- It was explained that young people used to come for an element of the foster training and which has always been very well received. Young people eager to attend and be a greater part of the programme.
- Councillors thanked Speakerbox for sharing their experiences and considered these children and young people best placed to be involved in the training and recruitment of foster carers
- Confirmed young inspectors to have quarterly meetings to discuss suggestions for improvements
- Issue of care leavers in supported accommodation having access to the gym and information to be provided to enable
- Noted planned meetings with the virtual school and head of service, permanence and resources to discuss mentoring in education.
- Mark Kerr referred to the Lifelong Improvement for looked-after children) project, which is a pioneering initiative, originally developed by the care-leaver group A National Voice (ANV), that trains care-experienced young people to become inspectors of local authority care services. Acknowledgement that each child has a different journey.

7. CORPORATE PARENTING SUBSTANCE MISUSE REPORT

Dr Stacy John-Legere (designated looked after doctor) and Joy Edwards, (designated nurse for looked after children) presented the report to committee and provided an update on substance use and misuse confirming current position and next steps.

- It was explained that number have increased for substance misuse, mainly cannabis, some vaping, alcohol and the use of other drugs. Thankful for the honesty of young people to colleagues.
- This report represents a deeper dive into the issue, calling on professional leads and involving those children/young people

placed out of borough. A risk and finish group also used in order to promote providing action and guidance for young people.

- A referral pathway in Southwark is used and all staff in the looked after children team are trained and local services and systems are good and in place to address any issues. Further work is needed for those children/young people out of the borough. Also referenced work that has been undertaken and a collaboration with the council's drug and alcohol unit manager with the council.
- Efforts are being made to promote the use of the NHS app for young people to increase their access to support and enable this access.
- Plans are in place to provide further support to foster carers, social workers and personal assistants.
- Noted the level of support for children in Southwark and the need to look at those who are not, which represents most of the cohort in Southwark.

Discussion

- Noted work with drugs and alcohol team in Southwark and the self-medicating element that sometimes prevails for impacted young people
- The need to ensure that young people are aware of what can be accessed to enable support
- The virtual head referred to a plan to look at the whole area and collaborative work that is planned on student behaviour and substance misuse.

RESOLVED:

That the following recommendations be noted:

1. That parity of offer for Southwark children looked after (CLA) placed outside of the borough boundaries be reviewed.
2. That in partnership with Public Health: emerging substance trends be monitored and responses adapted accordingly including acceptance of intervention.
3. That data quality and validation across health and social care systems with benchmarking of Southwark's data against

statistical neighbours and Southeast London (SEL) boroughs be improved.

4. That a further report on this item at be submitted to a future corporate parenting committee.

8. CORPORATE PARENTING ANNUAL REPORT 2025

Poppy Laurens, service development officer presented the report to committee outlining the importance of the voice of children and young people in the report.

Councillor Jasmine Ali indicated her intention to include an acknowledgement of the names of officers that have supported this work on the corporate parenting committee.

RESOLVED:

That the following recommendations to cabinet be noted by the corporate parenting committee

That cabinet:

1. That the report including progress of corporate parenting strategy, areas of focus for 2025 and work of the corporate parenting committee be noted.
2. That it be noted that a child and young person friendly easy read version of the report that will be shared widely with children in care and care leavers and made publicly available and easily accessible on the council's website.

9. SOUTHWARK HOMES FOR SOUTHWARK CHILDREN UPDATE / FOSTER CARE REPORT - RECRUITMENT AND RETIREMENT

Officers provided an update to committee on Southwark homes for children outlining the presence of a board who are working on developing more high-quality homes. Confirmed that Olive House children's home has now opened and has been classed as outstanding on all categories following an inspection. The inspection was very child focused involvement children and young people in the process.

Other key issues covered:

- Noted less children in care and efforts to ensure children live locally and use of kinship carers
- Have seen improved placement stability and work to see how young people can be supported
- Noted the corporate parenting committee annual report and housing allocations policy opening 1-bedroom properties to young people. Further work required at the governance level in the allocation policy
- Growing and supporting foster carers and local placements. Confirmed that by end of the year 10 -11 foster carers to be recruited
- Reunification. Work to try and enable children to return home. A mother had commented that if she had been given support on a par with foster carers, that she could have continued to look after her child
- Priority to reduced high-cost placements as not always the best or good outcomes for children and young people. Growing foster care options and supporting reunification
- Corporate parenting strategy to be reviewed at the end of March 2026, awaiting Brightspots input.

Discussion arising

- Foster care recruitment issues partly linked to housing but a societal shift in fostering and not seeing the good news stories every day
- Update on staffing situation at home
- Higher cost placements and commissioning. Requested that this be looked at the next corporate parenting committee in April 2026
- Request for letter to be drafted to Josh McAlister, Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing to come and speak to young people and about what doing currently and plans for the future.

10. ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT

Daisy May-James (permanence lead service manager) and Audrey Bouazizi (head of service Adopt London South) updated the committee on Southwark's Adoption Performance 2024-25.

- Noted that the number of adoptions has dropped but the positive trend that foster carers are going onto adopt. Sufficiency

challenges in adoption

- Looking at early support offer and starting to do work embedded by experience and being proactive
- Much greater insight into children experience against a changing landscape
- Homes found for children very good, reinforced with an early support offer and proactive steps
- Run an adoption group that any child can attend and provides a safe space to discuss issues / experiences
- Black adoption project and work to provide good permanence arrangements
- Strong governance and regular meetings with service managers.

Discussion

- Infrastructure and blurred line between foster and adoption care support. It was confirmed that efforts were in place to further improve better targeted early support. Huge wealth of support, including fostering hubs.

RESOLVED:

1. That the progress of the children with a care plan of adoption in Southwark during the period of 1 April 2024 till 31 March 2025 be noted.
2. That the activity of the local authority working in partnership with Adopt London South (ALS) during 2024-25 be noted.
3. That the Adopt London South Annual Report for 2024 – 2025 be noted.

11. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS (IRO) AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND PARTICIPATION ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25

Clare Ryan, service manager, quality assurance, children's and adults' services presented the report to committee.

A letter from a child to their IRO (Independent Review Officer) was circulated to the committee to demonstrate the value and support felt by children and young people for this support and service

offered.

Further issues outlined

- Good links with permanent leads
- Informal and formal resolution policy
- Fostering IROs now inhouse with 2 permanent IROs for 64 foster carers
- Further work needed on IRO footprint
- Huge recruitment drive in house and council officers undertaking visits
- Housing seems to be a common issue identified by young people
- Priorities for next year, include consistency with IROs, working towards a resolution policy, children's reviews, modernising feedback from children and parents, developing work on fostering and recruitment of more volunteers.

RESOLVED:

That the Independent Review Officers (IRO) and children's rights and participation annual report 2024-25 be noted.

12. CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE WORKPLAN 2025-26

RESOLVED:

That the following draft agenda for 22 April 2026 meeting be noted:

- Speakerbox verbal update
- Southwark homes for Southwark children update
- Annual virtual headteacher's report
- Update on local offer on Kinship care
- Commissioning report (higher cost placements) arising from discussion at 25 February committee on Southwark homes for Southwark children update.

13. CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY 2026 - 2030 - NOTE FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That the timeline for the delivery of the new corporate parenting strategy 2026-30 be agreed.

The meeting ended at 4.20pm

CHAIR:

DATED: