

MINUTES OF MEETING Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel HELD ON Tuesday, 5th March, 2024, 7.00 - 9.15 pm

PRESENT:

Councillors: Makbule Gunes (Chair), Anna Abela, Marsha Isilar-Gosling, Sue Jameson and Grosskopf

ALSO ATTENDING:

37. FILMING AT MEETINGS

The Chair referred Members present to agenda Item 1 as shown on the agenda in respect of filming at this meeting, and Members noted the information contained therein.

38. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for Absence were received from Lourdes Keever and Yvonne Denny.

Apologies for lateness were received from Cllr Abela.

Cllr Adamou joined the meeting online.

39. ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None

40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

41. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

None.

42. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting on 4th January were agreed as a correct record.

43. CABINET MEMBER QUESTIONS - CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND FAMILIES

The Panel received a short verbal update from Cllr Zena Brabazon, Cabinet Member for Children, Schools & Families on recent developments within her portfolio. This was followed by a Q&A session with the Panel members. The key points put forward by the Cabinet Member in her introduction are summarised below:

- The Council underwent a three-week SEND inspection shortly after the Christmas holidays. Verbal feedback was given and the inspection report was expected to be published at the end of March. The Cabinet Member thanked Amanda Bernard and SEND Power for their participation and collaboration during the inspection. The Cabinet Member set out that co-production had been how Children's Services operated.
- Corporate Parenting Week took place last week and the Cabinet Member commented that it was a wonderful event that culminated in an awards ceremony for the foster parents. The Cabinet Member was effusive in her praise of the foster parents, the tremendous work they did, and the love and care that they showed the children.
- The Cabinet Member set out that the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee had really moved forward. They were participating in a champions project, where members had taken an area of interest and acted as an advisor/critical friend around children's social care.
- The first Youth at Risk conference took place at Spurs. It was reported that this event was well attended by partners and that they received a data presentation by the police.
- A event with school governors had taken place. The Cabinet Member welcomed this, but advised that there was a lot of work to do to support school governors in what was a very difficult time for school finances.
- An event with SEND Power took place which focused on mainstream education for SEND children. The event was attended by around 30 parents and a number of head teachers.

The following arose during the Q&A session with the Cabinet Member:

- a. The Panel queried the extent to which it was possible to match a child with a foster parent who wanted a long term placement, and the extent to which this was done with children and young people who had additional care needs. In response, officers advised that the Council adopted a therapeutic approach when matching placements, particularly those which involved children who were using CAMHS. Reassurance was provided that social workers were mindful of where strong relationships had been developed with foster carers. Following, the required assessments taking place, foster carers could apply for adoption or Special Guardianship. Where it was right for the child the Council would support the child to move on to another placement. The DCS reiterated that all decisions were driven by the needs of the child first and foremost.
- b. The Panel sought assurances about whether the Council had a process in place for Jewish foster placements. In response, officers advised that there were existing links with the Charedi community and that they were working to move forward on a more formalised process, but that this had met a few challenges. Officers advised that they were working hard to develop a diverse

- group of foster carers. In response to a clarification, officers suggested that the key challenge was around a national paucity of foster parents.
- c. In response to a follow-up question about the diversity of foster placements, the Cabinet Member advised that the foster carer event was very representative of the different communities in Haringey and that she was very proud of the diversity of the borough's foster carers. Officers advised that it was important that the borough had a wide pool of foster carers to reflect its communities, but that there were also circumstances where children needed to be moved very quickly. The Cabinet Member suggested that there were no hard and fast rules and that some foster parents looked like the children they cared for and some did not. It was emphasised that it was the courts who made a decision about whether a child was in danger and needed to be moved on, not the child's social worker.
 - d. The Panel sought assurances about what the biggest challenges were over the next six months. In response, the Cabinet Member advised that a lack of money in the system was the biggest challenge. There was simply not enough money in the education system. Schools were funded on a per pupil basis and so funding levels for future years were variable, these would largely be determined by the number of children in the borough.
 - e. The Panel sought assurances around permanent social workers, and comments were made around the parents of SEND children found it very difficult when social workers who were on temporary contracts moved on. The Panel queried whether there was a portal that could be used by parents to logon and check the details of their social worker. In response, the Panel was advised that the Council had moved from the previous Mosaic system to Liquid Logic. The new system had an add-on for a portal that could be accessed by parents with a child with an Educational Health and Care Plan. The portal would be orientated towards professionals and parents being able to access it. It was commented that the timescales for implementation were between 12 and 18 months.
 - f. The Panel emphasised the need to ensure that parents and carers were consulted on the design of how the portal would work. Officers set out that it was an existing system that had already been developed, it wasn't being designed from scratch, as such it had already undergone extensive user testing.

RESOLVED

Noted.

44. PRIVATE FOSTERING SEPTEMBER 2022-23

The Panel received a report which provided an update on private fostering notifications, assessments, and monitoring activity, and also provided a level of assurance to members that privately fostered children were being adequately safeguarded. The update covered the period from September 2022-23. The report was introduced by Keith Warren, Head of Children in Care & Placements, as set out in

the agenda pack at pages 9-16. Cllr Brabazon, Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Families was also present for this item, along with the Director of Children's Services. The following arose during the discussion of this item:

- a. The Panel queried what incentives there were for people to come forward and notify the Council of their private fostering arrangements. In response, officers advised that the incentive was that the Council would provide them with a social worker who they would meet on a six-weekly basis to ensure the child's support needs were being met. In relation to a follow-up question, the Director acknowledged that people did not automatically associate that having another person's children staying with them for the summer constituted a private fostering arrangement. In this example, the child would not be in school and there would be limited interactions between that child and the state. It was acknowledged that part of the problem was around identifying children who were under private fostering arrangements and the challenge was to raise awareness of this through schools, GPs, hospitals and faith groups.
- b. The Panel sought clarification on whether private fostering arrangements came to the fostering or adoption panels, and whether councillors still sat on that panel. In response, officers advised that private adoptions were a separate process as they involved a family arrangement, and therefore those cases did not come to the fostering panel. The Cabinet Member advised that both the fostering and adoption panel still existed and that she sat on the fostering panel. The adoption panel was organised on a regional basis and the Cabinet Member advised that she was unsure of how Member representation on this was organised.
- c. The Panel commented that in terms of a social worker being an incentive, that many people may not see this as an incentive and may see this as a negative judgement on them. In response, the Director advised that the key selling point of private fostering arrangements should be seen as the safety and care of the child and emphasised that Members should encourage people to make a referral to Children's services if they were involved in a private fostering arrangement.
- d. In relation to SEND fostering needs, officers set out that any child with additional needs that was part of a private fostering arrangement would be treated the same as any other members of the child population when it came to access to SEND services.
- e. In response to a request for clarification about the regional adoption arrangements, officers advised that previously every local authority had its own in-house adoption agency but that this was changed in around 2016 when the government brought in regional clusters of adoption agencies. Haringey was part of the London North cluster and the lead authority was Islington. Lydia Samuels already brought an annual adoption report to CPAC. The Cabinet Member suggested that the report could be brought to the Panel in future if Members wished.

RESOLVED

Noted.

45. SOCIAL CARE ANNUAL PERFORMANCE 2022/2023

The Panel received a report which provided an overview of safeguarding and looked after children activity and performance for 2022/2023. The report was introduced by Ann Graham, Director of Children's Services as set out in the report pack at pages 21-40. The Panel noted that the AD for Social Care and Safeguarding had given her apologies for the meeting and that any questions that required a detailed response would have to be responded to in writing. The following arose during the discussion of this report:

- a. The Chair welcomed the report and highlighted the fact that the report identified that child poverty levels in Haringey were the 8th highest in London and suggested that this was something that the Panel may want to have a more detailed update on in future.
- b. The Chair also noted the number of children who were in contact with the police and suggested that at a future meeting members may want an update on how the Council and its partners were supporting children who came into contact with domestic violence.
- c. The Panel sought further information about what the strategy was for supporting children with SEND needs as they made the transition to adulthood. The Panel commented that they were concerned about cases of young people falling through the net and that they would like to better understand how future transition pathways would be improved through a dedicated transition service. In response, the DCS advised the report was specifically focused on children but that she was happy to have a discussion about this issue outside of the meeting.
- d. The Panel queried the statement in paragraph 9.8.5 of the report, which stated that 80% of children were placed within 20 miles of Haringey. In response, officers advised that this was a performance indicator set by central government and that 20 miles was the maximum. This would also include children placed in neighbouring boroughs. The DCS also emphasised that that a placement would be made based on what was best for the child, and that there were situations where that child's family might be in another city and being placed out of London was best for the child.

RESOLVED

That the Committee noted the report and, in particular:

- i. Noted the service improvement and challenges contained within the report as well as the actions taken during 2022/23 in response to local demand and the financial pressures experienced by the service in relation to placements.
- ii. Noted the areas identified as priorities for 2023/24 following analysis and review of the year's performance and the Ofsted findings as published in April 2023.

46. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY 2022/26: PROGRESS REPORT

The Panel received a presentation, which provided a progress update on the Looked After Children Sufficiency Strategy 2022-26. The strategy had previously been considered by Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee in February. The presentation was introduced by Keith Warren, Head of CIC & Placements as set out in the additional report pack. The Director of Children Services, along with the AD Early Help and Prevention were present for this item. The Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Families was also present. The following arose during the discussion of this item:

- a. The Panel sought clarification around unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC), the psychological impact on those children and the carrying out of age assessments. In response, officers advised that the service followed all of the relevant guidelines and legislation. Age assessments were carried out in line with the relevant guidelines and were carried out by trained staff. These assessments were also open to challenge by the child's family. The DCS emphasised that the process was absolutely carried out in a child-centric way.
- b. The Panel queried the age cut-off point for children in care and the transition arrangements for when they were no longer children. In response, officers advised that young people were classed as children in care up until the age of 18. After 18, they leave care and become young adults. The Council continued to support care leavers, according to criteria, up until they are 25, such as supporting them with a disability or if they go to university. The DCS advised that from 14 onwards, social workers would begin to have conversations with young people, about them getting older. It was noted that the Council had a statutory duty to know where its care leavers were after 18, and that all support did not just stop on the advent of their 18th birthday.
- c. The Panel sought clarification about the reduction in LAC numbers and the reasons behind this. In response, the DCS advised that significant improvement in the early years' service had an impact, but that there were a number of factors involved. The Director emphasised that the number of children in care was the number, and that it didn't really matter if it went up or down. The key thing was that the right number of children, who needed to be in care were in care. If the numbers increased or decreased significantly, she would be asking her staff to do an audit of every child in care to make sure the right number of children were in care.
- d. In response to a question around training for foster carers for UASC, officers advised that that the care needs of a child were universal and that training was provided to foster carers. The key difference would be when that child had suffered trauma and specialist support was available for those children.
- e. The Panel emphasized the importance of overnight respite care for parents, particularly those with SEND children. Officers advised that previously there had been overnight care arrangements available, officers were working to find alternative provision and would update members when they had something in place.

RESOLVED

Noted

47. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Chair passed on her thanks to Lourdes Keever, who had sat on the Panel since 2019 as a co-opted Member.

RESOLVED

Noted

48. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

N/A

49. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that this was the last meeting of the municipal year. Dates for 2024/25 would be agreed at Annual Council on 20th May.

CHAIR: Councillor Makbule Gunes

Signed by Chair

Date