

MINUTES TO THE CORPORATE ADVISORY PARENTING BOARD HELD ON 14TH JANUARY 2025.

Location: The Westbury Room, George Meehan House, 294 High Road, London N22 8JZ

Attendees

Councillors

- Cllr Brabazon (Chair)
- Cllr Weston
- Cllr Johnson
- Cllr Ali
- Cllr Opoku

Officers

- Ann Graham (Director of Children's Services)
- Dionne Thomas (Assistant Director of Social Care and Safeguarding)
- Richard Hutton (Performance Officer)
- Lydia Samuels (Adopt North London)
- Keith Warren (Head of Children in Care and Placements)
- Sarah Pike (Principal Social Worker)
- Pauline Morris (Head of ESQA)
- Eghele Eyituyo (Head of Virtual School)
- Jackie Difolco (Assistant Director of Early Help and Intervention)
- Emma Cummergen (Head of Young Adults Services).
- Jane Edwards (Assistant Director of School and Learning Service).
- Pauline Simpson (Strategic Commissioner)
- Tenby Dzingai (Designated Nurse)
- Hejera Sheikh (Named Doctor for Children in Care)
- Lydia Samuels (Head of Service at Adopt North London)

1- FILMING AT MEETING

The Chair ran through the required information. The information was noted by all present.

2- APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Opoku sent apologies for lateness. Cllr Isilar-Gosling sent apologies for absence due to a clash with council surgery. Cllr Collett also sent apologies as she was needed at a council call- in.

3- ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

4- DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None was declared.

5- MINUTES

RESOLVED

The Committee agreed the minutes to the last meeting.

6- PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR QUARTER TWO.

The Senior Performance Officer took the Panel through the report. The Chair opened the floor for questions.

A question was raised as to the number of those children within a stable placement. The Panel wanted to see the types of reasons why placements may breakdown. The Senior Performance Officer proposed to include this in the next report to the Panel. **ACTION**

The Panel requested more information as to why children and young people were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). Figures on disability or any other relevant reasons were requested to get a more accurate picture of the situation. The Senior Performance Officer proposed to include this in the next report. **ACTION**

The Panel then discussed the figure for updated care plans for under 16s. Although the figure was at 84%, concerns were raised that there were those without care plans. The Senior Performance Officer then stated that all would have them and may have been recently reviewed, however there may have been delays in inputting onto the system (which the figure had been taken from).

Members of the Panel requested an idea of the complexity of circumstances facing young people in Residential and other types of placements. The Director responded that there would be issues with safeguards and the identification of subjects. Anonymised case studies could be considered though, to give the Panel

an idea of the complexity involved. The Director would discuss this with her team and inform the Panel what was possible. **ACTION**

RESOLVED

The Committee noted the report.

7 – ANNUAL REPORT FOR ADOPT NORTH LONDON (ANL).

Ms Lydia Samuels from Adopt North London took the Committee through the report.

The Committee heard that:

- There were concerns from ANL about the requirement to prioritise non-agency adoptions and the impact this had on local children in care. In addition, there was concern that requirements were not robust enough to assess the parents and have the right amount of direct contact with children in the family environment. There were around 12 cases of these so far out of a total adoption rate of 40 per year. In these cases, social workers were able to see children and families for assessments when the family were in the UK, however, were not able to monitor or assess the child in a family environment in person.
- Processes were complicated further when children had been adopted in a third country where the adoption standards may have been lower than the UK – and a lower level of evidence could be provided. However, British courts were being asked to sign the Adoption Order. The Director of Children's Services proposed to talk further to ANL about these issues and present a case to the DfE in association with other Regional Adoption Agencies.

ACTION

- An update on the conversations with the DfE was then requested by Panel Members. **ACTION.**
- The Public Law Working Group identified there were recommendations for more direct contact with families, however resources were needed to deliver this. The Head of Service stated that ANL would discuss this with the DfE who would consider the changes around adoption as well as future funding.
- Best practice recommendations covered: 1) Direct regular contact with the child and families. More families could benefit from direct contact however the team did not want this to be destabilising for the family. There were also ongoing challenges to recruit adopters. 2) The training of social workers to identify opportunities for early permanence 3) It was also highlighted that

international inspections often overlapped with RA inspections and work could be done to streamline the process.

- It was identified that Thurrock had a similar situation to Kent whereby prospective Black adoptive families were moving out from London, where there was a lack of Black children in the adoption system. A partnership with ANL would increase the opportunities of families and children being matched. It was suggested and agreed that the Head of Service would consider working with regional agencies in Thurrock and Kent areas too. **ACTION**
- There were comments from the Panel that the data in the report was hard to interpret. There were differences in numbers between the councils and it was hard to ascertain whether this was because of a difference in practice or standards. The Head of Service proffered that there may be many reasons – some of them positive – for instance good kinship networks, good familial support which prevented pregnant women from adopting out. It was stated that if everything was working perfectly in the system there would be a zero-adoption rate as the child would be fully supported within the family.
- The Assistant Director of Social Care and Safeguarding commented that the ultimate aim of adoption services would be to keep children out of care and Haringey excelled at this. Results from the Courts and Ofsted Inspections were used as learning tools to ensure that children were being looked after in the best way.
- Discussion then turned to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Adoptive families had fed back that there were very long waiting lists for CAMHS even though the need was higher. Although ANL had a pathway and dedicated support fund –the pathways for ADHD/Autism often took years for a diagnosis and this caused major issues for families. This issue was hard to resolve due to changes in the health system, and the way that health systems were organised currently. Work was currently being done to identify and agree which services were the responsibility of CAMHS and Adoption Services. Adopted children were often deprioritised as they were seen as having safe and engaged parents. This did not consider the background of child trauma and loss.
- The Head of Services explained there was a lack of data in the analysis of adoption breakdowns. It was hard to capture the data after the child had been adopted. The child and family may have moved across local authority boundaries. Anecdotally there was evidence that a huge range of support was needed.

- An update from Adopt North London would be added to the agenda at a later date. **ACTION**

RESOLVED

The Committee noted the report.

10 – THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF CHILDRENS CARE.

The Assistant Director of Social Care and Safeguarding ran through a verbal update on the reforms for children's care, which included the Keeping Children Safe, and Helping Families Thrive central government policy and the new Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill proposed changes.

The Committee heard that:

- Work with ASPIRE continued to make an impact on key areas. Feedback from young people was given on accommodation for those in care – and led to effective policy changes.
- The biggest challenges faced by the service in implementing these changes were in terms of the expanding legal duties and responsibilities of local authorities and Ofsted. It was stated that it would be 2027 until the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill was introduced and practice leaders would be thinking now about how to resource it.
- Care leavers needs were being addressed locally in Haringey. Steps were being taken to ensure that young care leavers could also live close to their residential home in Haringey.
- The changes proposed under the new Bill would be extensive and the London Labour Leads would be writing to the government to request extra funds to cover these new changes.
- Some money had been received for Children and Family Hubs however this was not enough to cover the extensive changes required by the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.
- Communities that traditionally homeschooled were concerned about the proposed changes however there had been a lot of misinformation about this and it was not the case that most would be affected.
- The Virtual School will continue to be extended to those in care, however not extended out to schools. Ofsted consulted with Virtual School Heads and

asked for feedback in terms of a survey on what child protection should look like.

- It was pointed out that each school had varying caseloads of child protection. However, consideration was being given to how schools and education could have a more active role in child protection as well as the resourcing of this.
- Guidance would be forthcoming for the role of Designated Safeguarding Leads and possible changes. It was mentioned that boundaries for responsibilities were important in professions.

RESOLVED

The Committee noted the report.

10 – CARE EXPERIENCE AS A ‘PROTECTED CHARACTERISTIC’.

The Assistant Director for Social Care and Safeguarding and Head of Young People’s Service ran through the report.

The Committee heard that:

- Lived care experience was apparent at Assistant Director level at Haringey. Support and belief were key for care leavers to succeed.
- The definition of care experienced is someone who had been looked after by a Local Authority at a point in time.
- There was widely reported stigma and discrimination - especially if the young person had other protected characteristics. This contributed to poorer outcomes for the care experienced. The Josh McAllister report to central government recommended that care experience should be an additional protected characteristic in law to tackle this stigma. Some local authorities agreed to this and in May 2022 at Haringey’s Full Council meeting a motion was passed to create a tenth Protected Characteristic for the care experienced.
- Although this has not been enshrined in law, it has further inspired collaborations with other councils to ensure that outcomes for the care experienced would improve. Many local authorities have made changes to practice. Haringey have actively included many care- experienced young people in policymaking through the Champions Model. Care leavers are currently working with senior managers to improve outcomes and ASPIRE ensure that young people are represented at CPAC. In addition, Haringey

provide support for learning and development and will guarantee an interview to any care leaver who meets the job criteria for council posts. Haringey's own care leaver offer was detailed in the report.

- A recommendation came from the Lead Officer to come back to the Committee with a fuller list of options for adding care experience as a protected characteristic in law after further research had been carried out in conjunction with other councils. **ACTION**
- Members of the Panel shared the name of a charity that helped residents of Tottenham, Wood Green, and Hornsey in financial hardship as they were actively looking for funding applications – and could help care leavers with white goods and more.

RESOLVED

The Committee accepted the recommendation.

Meeting ended at **9:30**