

**MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW - CORPORATE PARENTING
MONDAY, 8 NOVEMBER 2010**

Councillors Alexander, Ejiofor (Chair), Gibson and Solomon
:

Co-opted members: Ms Y. Denny (Church representative) and Ms. S. Young (Parent governor)

LC11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

LC12. URGENT BUSINESS

None.

LC13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

LC14. MINUTES

AGREED:

That consideration of the minutes of the meeting of 5 October be deferred until the next meeting.

LC15. CORPORATE PARENTING

The Panel received evidence from a number of foster carers and staff.

It was noted that prospective foster carers could have the perception that private agencies paid better than the local authority. However, although private agencies charged more, they also took a percentage of the amount. When carers spoke to the local authority, they realised that there was no financial benefit to working for an agency. In the past, only private agencies had offered out-of-hours support but the local authority now also provided this.

It was considered that education was the biggest challenge that faced children in care. The children that performed better were generally those that had received tutoring at home. This had provided a real benefit for children. The need for tutoring was established by the social worker – some children got it whilst others did not.

A constant social worker could also make a significant difference. Turnover of social workers seemed to go through phases. Sometimes there was stability and sometimes there were a lot of changes and/or gaps. In some cases, the young person did not know the social worker had changed. In such cases, contact had to be with the team manager and responses to enquires could take time.

It was noted that all foster carers also had a social worker and they could be used in circumstances where the young person could not contact their own social worker. However, it was felt that it was important that the young person was able to speak to

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their own social worker and they could become frustrated if this was not possible. If social workers were very good, they could be given additional work and this could lead to them having case loads that were too heavy. In addition, the transition to leaving care did not always work well.

It was felt that support groups for foster carers funded by the Council and run through Haringey Foster Carers Association worked very well. They were well run and beneficial for carers. The Chair of the Foster Carers Association had played a very important part in this.

It was thought that young people could benefit from life skills training as such basic skills could not be taken for granted.

It was noted that a lot of care was taken in ensuring that placements were appropriate. The majority of carers were now black and there was now more of a problem with placing white children. There was a particular need for more foster carers from Eastern Europe. It was important to place children where they would feel most comfortable. Carers could play a role in encouraging children to develop an awareness of their own culture and background.

It could be difficult for social workers to engage with young people on certain issues such as sexual health if they were of a different gender and it would therefore be better if they could be matched according to this. However, there was a shortage of male social workers.

Young people could visit their foster carer after they had left care. They saw foster carers as their parents and had a different relationship with them to the one they had with their social worker. The young people saw themselves as part of the family. Social workers were not always accessible and were subject to change.

It could be difficult for young people who went out of London for their higher education as there might not be anywhere for them to go during vacations.

It was considered that there was a need for support to address challenging behaviour by young people as it was important that they understood boundaries. Working to impose discipline on them would be better than constantly moving them. It was noted that emotional support was available. The Tavistock Centre provided this but it was not always wanted by children or carers. The service did not wish to have to move children in such circumstances but had to if carers were unable to cope. Challenging behaviour was sometimes due to the experience of trauma.

It was felt that support services could respond more quickly. This was particularly true of the Tavistock and audiology. The Tavistock was not always suitable for children. Many went once and did not go back. Although some children needed counselling, others would be more suited to mentoring. Both the Tavistock and CAMHS had long waiting lists. There was little support that was available below this level.

It was felt that support for foster carers had improved in recent years. In particular, there was more consistency in the supervising of social workers. A continuing concern was the time that it took to deal with allegations against carers and the poor communication that often accompanied suspensions of them. However, it was noted that if an allegation was made, the service had an obligation to investigate it.

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It was felt that young people could be better prepared for leaving care by a period of semi independent care. Processes were not always explained as well as they could be. Young people did not always know all their entitlements. It was noted that young people who returned to the home of foster carers needed to be CRB checked if there were new foster children. There could sometimes be problems with envy where there were new children in the home.

Carers helped young people to prepare for leaving care. They were given £52 to live on and, to assist with this, they were taught budgeting skills. However, young people could sometimes not be prepared for the range of costs associated with independence, such as heating and lighting. The accommodation that they were offered was not always of a particularly high standard. The teaching of skills to prepare young people for independence was included in the care plan.

There had been long waits in the past to hear the results of applications to foster and it had sometimes been quicker to use agencies. This had improved and there was now a welcome programme for new cares which included an invitation to the support group.

It was suggested that all children in care could given a trust fund that the Council controlled and that they received at the age of 18. The allowance given to carers currently included an element for saving for young people but not all carers were good at using this effectively. A trust fund could replace this. The longer that children were in care, the more money that they would get. It could also be extended to those cared for by agency carers. It was noted that the Council had looked at this option previously but it had proven to be difficult to set up.

The recruitment process was felt to be onerous. However, it was acknowledged that guidance had to be followed and the process could be intrusive. Haringey had high standards and it was inevitable that there would be drop out during the recruitment process.

The Panel thanked foster carers and staff for their kind assistance.

Clr Joseph Ejiofor

Chair