

**MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING ADVISORY COMMITTEE
TUESDAY, 17 JULY 2012**

Councillors Allison, Brabazon, Reece, Solomon and Waters (Chair)

Apologies Councillor Stennett

Also Present: Councillor Egan, Rachel Oakley, Chris Chalmers, Lesley Kettles, Shanti Jacob, Marion Wheeler

| MINUTE NO. | SUBJECT/DECISION | ACTON BY |
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| CPAC1 | <p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (IF ANY)</p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Stennett, Debbie Haith and Libby Blake.</p> <p>Cllr Egan attended the meeting for Cllr Stennett.</p> | |
| CPAC2 | <p>URGENT BUSINESS</p> <p>There were no items of urgent business</p> | |
| CPAC3 | <p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest put forward.</p> | |
| CPAC4 | <p>MINUTES</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on the 19th March 2012 were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.</p> | |
| CPAC5 | <p>MATTERS ARISING</p> <p>The committee were keen to see the follow up letter sent to schools in relation to the expenditure of the looked after children's element of the Pupil Premium grant. Committee Members, who were also school governors, commented that that had not yet seen any correspondence relating to expenditure on LAC and felt that this was a key issue to follow up on. Agreed that a copy of the correspondence be emailed to Committee Members</p> <p>Agreed that the contact number for Kate Cairns be supplied to Cllr Brabazon.</p> | <p>Attracta Craig</p> <p>Attracta Craig</p> |
| CPAC6 | <p>TERMS OF REFERENCE</p> <p>The committee were asked to note the terms of reference for this committee which were agreed by the Cabinet in June 2012. The committee were able to recommend any required changes to the Cabinet for consideration.</p> | |

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| | <p>The report advised that the Cabinet were able to establish advisory committees and provided some background for the reasons behind the establishment of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee as well as providing an update on the recent governance review which had examined the role of the committee.</p> <p>In view of the governance delivery group's, previous intention to decommission the Corporate Parenting committee and given the Scrutiny Panel for Children's services had developed a work programme there was discussion about whether the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee would be handing over to the Scrutiny Children's Panel or continuing to work separately to the Scrutiny Panel. The membership of the Children's Scrutiny Panel contained members of both Corporate Parenting and Children's Safeguarding Policy and Practice Committee indicating preparation towards this change in committee structure.</p> <p>The Chair clarified that the committee would not be working in "handover mode" as this was a Cabinet advisory committee and had distinct responsibilities from a Scrutiny Panel. The work plan of the Scrutiny panel could be looked at to ensure that there was not a duplication of work. In relation to the governance review recommendations, these did not indicate that the Corporate Parenting Advisory committee would automatically be decommissioned after one year as there would be a review. The Corporate Parenting Committee was responsible for monitoring children and young people in care and ensuring their life chances were maximised in terms of health, educational attainment and access to training and health and this would be considered as part of any review. The governance review recommendations were subject to change, as previously experienced, and therefore the committee should continue working as a Cabinet Advisory committee until further notice. To allow members of the committee to further discuss their concerns and suggestion for improved working of the committee, the chair agreed to have a separate informal discussion with them at the end of the meeting.</p> | |
| <p>CPAC7</p> | <p>PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT : CHILDREN AND FAMILIES</p> <p>Members of the committee considered the headline performance data for looked after children as at the end of May 2012. There was a further breakdown enclosed of the performance where the indicator showed a performance lower than the target which had been set.</p> <p>Overall the committee were concerned about the format of the report as the figures in each row did not seem to add up and further explanation was required about the performance figure with some background information.</p> <p>OP148 (Care leavers in education, employment or training). It was noted that the figures in the report were not up to date and it was agreed that more accurate information advising the number of care leavers in</p> | |

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| <p>education, employment and training would be sent to committee members by email separately. It was also noted that the recently obtained aggregate quarterly figure for this indicator was just above target at 77.6%.</p> | <p>Chris Chalmers</p> |
| <p>OP147 (Care Leavers in suitable accommodation) The committee were advised that these figures should be interpreted with care as the percentages were based on small numbers. For example at the end of April, two young people were counted as not being in touch. Currently one was still termed missing and the other had been found suitable accommodation. The committee were interested in returning to the subject of transition to understand the potential impact of the welfare reforms on care leavers and also requested a further update on the support provided to care leavers to tackle isolation. The report should include information about the support in transition. As an initial response, the committee noted that the council was one of the few authorities providing supported accommodation with a live in volunteer. The committee agreed that a report come back to committee in September on Transition taking the above comments into account.</p> | <p>Chris Chalmers</p> |
| <p>OP391 – (Timeliness of placements of looked after children for adoption following an agency decision that the child should be placed for adoption) The target was to complete three adoptions at the end of May and one had been completed. Although a small number this would still bring performance down. The performance in Adoption was due to be discussed at agenda item 9.</p> | |
| <p>OP386 - (Children in care cases which were reviewed within required timescales) The committee were informed that there were technical problems with capturing this data and the service were working to get an accurate figure. This discrepancy had been realised from manually checking the figures. The service was working with IT to resolve how the data is collected from Framework 1 correctly as this was key management data. The committee noted that if a case was not reviewed within the allocated days but considered 1 or 2 days later this would still show the target as not being met. The committee were reassured by the Head of Service for Safeguarding Quality Assurance & Practice Development that following the manual check on the figures she was confident that there was not a significant issue with the completion of these reviews. The technical issues were expected to be resolved by September and the committee requested an update on this at their next meeting.</p> | <p>Rachel Oakley</p> |
| <p>HY34 – (Percentage of social work posts permanently filled - annual indicator) The service was meeting this target with only a very small number of agency staff. A question was asked about the graduate social work scheme and it was noted that the service was on its last intake of graduate trainees as this scheme would not continue, due to budget reductions, in the forthcoming year. However the service had a good established working relationship with Middlesex University and would notify their graduates of any work opportunities. There were also a</p> | |

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| | <p>more social workers available for posts compared to a few years ago also enabling the permanent filling of posts.</p> <p>OP409 – (Foster carer recruitment) The committee agreed that they wanted a wider update on Foster care recruitment and requested a report to committee in September which should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Progress on how the consortium is working ➤ Drop out rates ➤ Costs ➤ Situation regarding the poaching of potential foster carers ➤ Understanding how many foster carers live in the borough and who they work for ➤ Any other relevant statistics. <p>The performance figures should also distinguish between the number of kinship and stranger foster carers recruited as requested at the last meeting in March.</p> <p>OP389 (No of Children in care including unaccompanied asylum seeking children) the figure for May stood at 562 and previously in December 2011 this figure had been 608. The Committee were keen to get the background on this significant reduction in number and understand the factors contributing to this. Also it would be useful to compare this trend in relation to last year to gain a further sense of the significance of the changes made and understand if there had been a shift in the management of risk. Agreed that an email be sent to members of the committee providing this requested information. <i>Since the meeting this matter was resolved and the change in the numbers understood from looking at previous performance reports. Therefore this query was withdrawn.</i></p> <p>OP419 (Number of children missing or absconded from care at any point of the month) There were two under 16 LAC children missing, one of which was an unauthorised absence and the other was missing. There was due to be a strategic discussion on the missing young person this week where an immediate course of action would be agreed following sightings. The committee noted that the Cabinet Member for Children would receive weekly updates on missing children and absconders from care.</p> | Chris Chalmers |
| CPAC8 | <p>INTERIM INDEPENDENT REVIEW OFFICERS REPORT</p> <p>The committee received an interim report from the Independent Reviewing Officers service for looked after children. The report contained initial findings on the work of the service for the period up to March 31st 2012. A full report was expected to be produced in September 2012.</p> | |

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The legal context within which the IRO (Independent Review Officers) operated was set out. Recent regulations had strengthened the role of the IRO and further enabled their independence to challenge and scrutinise children's cases to ensure that the child's interests were protected throughout the care planning process.

Currently there were seven IRO posts of which three positions were covered by agency staff and these were in the process of being permanently recruited to. In response to a question about the relationship between IRO's and social workers, it was noted that social workers valued the independence of the IRO as they understood that their advice and direction was in keeping with the best interests of the child/young person.

The IRO's had completed a number of audits throughout the year and were able to use the information collated to understand if there were any emerging themes about the care of looked after children and where improvements could be made. One of their successful recommendations was the Children's service agreeing to pay a foster care allowance when the LAC was still in education at 18. Also the service supported LAC seeking to obtain indefinite leave to remain in the country. The committee noted that the Children's service did not pay for naturalisation as this was a choice and it was more important for the young person to be helped to obtain indefinite leave to remain in the country. Members of the committee were interested in gaining a more detailed understanding of the process that the service adhered to in assisting LAC gain indefinite leave. Examining this process may help gain an understanding of where local councillors can help in dealings with the Home Office, on a political level, with more difficult cases.

Chris
Chalmers

The IRO's facilitated Family Group conferences, a process led by the family members to plan and make decisions for vulnerable child/children who were at risk. This year, the IRO's were aiming to increase the profile of these meetings because they would help identify alternatives to foster placements and adoption outside the family.

In response to a question, the advocacy role of the IRO was explained as well as how their interaction with children/ young people on understanding their wishes and views at LAC reviews.

In terms of the timeliness of assessments, decision making and action, clarification was sought on whether forward planning had improved. It was noted that there had been service wide training on the effectiveness of early planning and the permanency policy to ensure there was an understanding of how each service area contributed and had a role in permanency planning for children in care.

The Chair and Committee thanked the IRO service for this useful and insightful report.

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| <p>CPAC9</p> | <p>ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE</p> <p>The committee received the annual report of the Adoption service which contained information about: how it functioned, was guided, regulated, the recruitment of adopters, preparation of applicants, assessments for adoption, adoption panel working, current figures relating to children waiting to be adopted, staffing and key issues going forward for the service.</p> <p>The committee had already been made aware of the government's action plan for adoption which included speeding up the process for adoption. To enable this there would be an introduction of performance thresholds and a performance scorecard to track and profile progress. The committee considered the current score card and were concerned about the direction of the performance figures for the Adoption service and whether reductions in the journey time to adoption could be achieved. They noted that a DFE diagnostic team had visited the council to complete an assessment of the current performance and its likely progress to understand whether the council's service would need to be put into special measures. Following intensive interviews and an initial draft report it was felt that the assessment had gone well.</p> <p>As the council had a higher number of LAC they would consequently have a higher number of children to place for adoption. This coupled with the national problem in recruiting adopters and the mix of children with differing needs would be acknowledged by the DFE in their diagnostic assessment. Neighbouring boroughs were also facing similar issues and would receive a visit from the DFE diagnostic team.</p> <p>The committee learned that since January 2012 the Adoption Team had been fully staffed as prior to this there had been staff on maternity and sick leave. There was now an increased emphasis on seeking special guardianships with two members of staff working on this. There would be a high level of management monitoring to ensure that the targeted number of adoptions occurred on a quarterly basis. There was an adoption working party examining recruitment methodology, and considering an enhanced role for the voluntary sector. The key focus was timeliness and ensuring that this was given as equal importance as the quality of the placement. This would be aided by the service having improved data available to better manage performance. The Head of Service for Children in Care was also examining past adoption cases to further understand the factors involved in long running cases to inform improving the timeliness of adoptions.</p> <p>Further to considering the current Adoption Scorecard the Committee were assured that Adoption was a key priority for the Director of the Children's Services. It was agreed that there be an update to committee about the outcome of the diagnostic team visit as part of the Adoption Action plan report.</p> | <p>Debbie Haith</p> |

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| CPAC10 | EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC The press and public were excluded from the meeting for consideration of the Following item as it contained exempt information as defined in Section 100a of the Local Government Act 1972(as amended by Section 12A of the local Government Act 1985):Paras1&2:namely information relating to any individual, and information likely to reveal the identity of an individual. | |
| CPAC11 | UPDATE ON THE CLOSURE OF COUNCIL CHILDREN'S HOMES The committee noted that all the young people previously residing at the council children's homes had been suitably accommodated according to their situation in required placements. Children's Services were in the process of handing over the buildings to Property Services. | |
| CPAC12 | ANY OTHER BUSINESS The next meeting would take place on the 04 th September 2012. A member of the committee had received a complaint from a local children's centre who were claiming that they were unable to work efficiently with families with risks as they did not have access to Framework I system. This was disputed as the children centres connection with the safeguarding and support service had been strengthened. The children's centres further worked closely with the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) and were able to then further direct any issues to Children's Services. | |

Cllr Ann Waters

Chair

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