

MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING GROUP

Wednesday, 31 July 2024 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Jacq Paschoud, Chris Barnham, Paul Bell and Carol Webley-Brown

ALSO PRESENT:

Pinaki Ghoshal (Executive Director Children and Young People), Sean Maguire (Head of Corporate Parenting), Maleeka Dachi (Head of Integrated Adolescent Safeguarding Services), Richard Fowler (Virtual School Outreach Manager), Mana Gondora (Participation & Mentor Project Manager), Rachel Lanlokun (Designated Nurse LAC for Lewisham), Amanda Waldman (Lead Psychologist and Lead for Lewisham CAMHS), Samanta Federico (Committee Officer).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Luke Sorba

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7th May 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

The Chair noted that the meeting was planned to take place on 16th July 2024 and then rescheduled for 31st July 2024, at short notice. Thus, some of the invitees were not able to attend because the meeting conflicted with school summer holidays and CICC barbeque.

It was raised by the Chair that CPB was being conducted as formal Council Committees and suggested that the meetings of CPB should be flexible.

The Executive Director for Children and Young People agreed to look into the administration of CPB, the Terms of Reference and organise an internal meeting with the Legal Team to introduce some changes i.e., formalising foster carers as full members of the CPB and to make CPB arrangements more flexible and informal.

Action: Executive Director CYP

2. Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

3. Having a Voice: CICC / Elevation

The Participation and Mentoring Lead updated the Group about the recent activities of the Children in Care Council, as follows:

Children in Care Council and in Special Guardianship were not able to attend due to the Summer BBQ event taking place on the same day of the meeting.

One of the care leavers who would be turning 25 of age next year, received funding for £25K to run their own Independence Program. The young person, together with other care leavers from Lewisham, run a focus group on 9th July 2024 to discuss the importance of becoming independent. It emerged that some of the challenges care leavers experienced when moving to their properties was the understanding of the tenancy agreement, the eviction process and payment arrangements.

CICC planned to trial out the 'Journey to Adulthood' in November 2024. The project included 'A Day in the Life of Work' during which young people would be able to visit a radio station and explore the different job opportunities available.

The Participation and Mentoring Lead explained how CICC felt disheartened at the idea of turning 18 and 21 of age and not being able to access many services whilst also lacking the support of family and friends. At this regard, alternatives avenues were being explored such as working together with places like Lewisham Youth Project to continue running cooking, budgeting or other sessions without recurring to funds entirely from the local authority.

Safeguarding was another concern raised by young people during the focus group session. CICC felt their safeguarding was not being considered when some of the young people had been moved back to Lewisham Borough against their will. CICC believed alternative options should be available in supporting those young people who did not feel safe returning to the borough.

Referring to young people who did not want to return to Lewisham, the Executive Director of CYP confirmed that there was no national agreement to provide housing and other forms of support to LAC who wanted to live outside of their area. However, Lewisham Borough had several arrangements with other local authorities in southeast London. The idea was to roll out those arrangements to other boroughs in London before rolling them out nationally. To do so, each local authority would have to agree individually, and this process carried its challenges.

The Participation and Mentoring Lead talked about 'Power to Prevail', a Community Interest Company (CIC) co-funded by Jade Barnett and Liam Morgan. The mission of Power to Prevail was to empower disadvantaged young people and help them realise that their past and present circumstances did not define their ability to succeed. The idea was to pilot the scheme in Lewisham and Lambeth first and expand it to other boroughs in London, at a later stage.

Members asked what was being done about the concerns raised by CICC. The Participation and Mentoring Lead advised the Group that any feedback from young people should be forwarded to CYP management and taken into consideration when reviewing the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

The Chair expressed his willingness to contact the Mayor and local MPs in order to reach out to Ministers in the new Government and discuss issues of national interest.

4. Member's Feedback

Cllr Barnham advised the Board that he had written to the new Education Secretary explaining how Lewisham and other local authorities had been affected by the expensive cost of placements in the private sector for some of the looked after children. He had also asked for a response in relation to the Competition & Markets Authority (CMA) report with regard to profiteering in that market.

Cllr Paschoud mentioned the research carried out by Salford University on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). The research found that individuals with FASD were more likely to be involved with the Criminal Justice System than individuals who did not have FASD. She expressed her concerns about children in care with FASD who were at risk of entering the CJS.

The Lead for Lewisham CAMHS, Amanda Waldman, advised the Group that her team, together with the Community Paediatrics, had planned to run a FASD training course for young people in CAMHS in November 2024.

5. Foster Carers' Report

There were no foster carers present.

6. Corporate Parenting General Update

The Head of Corporate Parenting presented this report. The updates were summarised as follows:

The 2024/25 Quarter 1 (Apr-Jun) data was not yet published; however, it was confirmed that the latest figures showed an increase from 442 to 448 of children looked-after and a decrease from 54 to 48 in the number of care leavers compared to the previous quarter.

Along with other local authorities in England, Lewisham had been awarded £3.3m for Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme (FFCP) and

Corporate Parenting. FFCP's main aim was to deliver help and protection to children and families as well as preventing children from coming into care.

Since the last CPB meeting, the Senior Management structure across CYP Directorate had undergone a few changes, as follows:

- Head of Service, Corporate Parenting: Sean Maguire
- Head of Integrated Adolescent Safeguarding: Maleeka Dachi
- Service Group Manager – Care Resources: Fostering: Nicole Zwane (Intrm)
- Service Group Manager – Safe Space: Marcia Lee-Chang (Intrm)

Regarding Care Leavers as a protected characteristic, the Head of Corporate Parenting stated that work was being done to explore how the new status could be implemented both locally and nationally and, how it could be linked to the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

The Head of CP was happy to announce the proposal to develop Lewisham owned children's home. The project would initially provide 3 properties for solo placements, with a max of 5 beds, for young people with the most complex needs. Statistics in the report showed that the number of children in complex placements had notably increased from 2023 to 2024.

The CAMHS Lead confirmed that Lewisham had seen an increase in complex young people in Lewisham. These children often presented at A&E with autism, intellectual disabilities and severe behavioural challenges. The increase in the number of cases as well as the increase in the acuity of mental health difficulties appeared to affect many boroughs in London, not just Lewisham.

In response to a question about late payments of foster carers invoices, the Head of CP explained that the problem emerged following the changes to the workforce and to the financial transactions core accounting system. To address the issue, the Service was looking to develop new processes and introduce an automated scheduled payment system. While the new system was being implemented, the Head of CP would be liaising with placements providers to identify emerging issues and ensuring payments were completed within the statutory timeframes.

In response to a question, the Executive Director of CYP confirmed that holiday activity programmes were being offered to both free-school meals children and LAC; however, not all LAC accepted that offer.

The Participation and Mentoring Lead raised that foster carers and social workers were often unaware of activities and events available for children and young people. She suggested mailshot groups to ensure information reached all relevant parties.

Education

The Virtual School Outreach Manager presented this report. He highlighted the following points:

CYP would be supported through transitions between different stages e.g., entry into care, moving school, to minimise disruption to learning. The group focused on supporting the transition from Year 13 to leaving care services and there was no plan to extend the Virtual School offer to care leavers.

The new Virtual School SEND coordinator was in post and would support Lewisham SEND in prioritising the needs of CLA with SEND with particular focus on students educated outside of borough.

VS had been collaborating with the Attachment Research Community (ARC) to ensure that all Lewisham Schools would be trauma aware by 2025. The Group noted that 12 schools in Lewisham were actively engaged with the programme and 2 of them were working towards gold status, meaning they could become national learning hubs in this area.

The Lead Psychologist for Lewisham CAMHS requested the list of schools working with ARC in Lewisham.

**Action: VS Outreach
Manager**

Health

The Designated Nurse LAC for Lewisham presented the report and highlighted the following points:

A specialist nurse for leaving care had been recruited to support Care Leavers emotional wellbeing.

Regarding the Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), the plan was for CP to work closely with the Community Paediatrician team to capture data and support women whose babies were at risk of FASD.

Seven care leavers had used the new free prescription scheme launched in December 2023 and, efforts were being made to further advertise the scheme.

Members asked how sexual and reproductive services could be made more accessible to LAC considering cultural barriers and religious differences. The Designated Nurse LAC explained that, during health assessment reviews with LAC, nurses would discuss sexual health with the young person. Nurses were trained to talk to young people from different cultural background and understand cultural barriers.

Members asked to see (anonymised) examples/evidence highlighting possible issues experienced by LAC in accessing sexual and reproductive services because of cultural barriers/religious differences.

2.

7. Theme/Focus: BEING INDEPENDENT

The Head of Integrated Adolescent Safeguarding Services introduced the report and noted that in the last financial year, Lewisham had about 600 children who experienced a care episode.

The Group noted an increase in females' exploitation data and missing episodes. Work was being done to explore the theme and identify alternative measures to reduce the number of missing episodes.

Evidence also showed an increase in missing episodes for 15 years old children who collectively had 115 episodes – however, 3 children accounted for 47 of the 115 episodes. It was noted that not all missing episodes were about risk, sometimes it was about missed curfew or children gravitating to their group of friends or familiar connections.

In response to a question about missing episodes and their level of risk, the Head of CP suggested to include a breakdown of missing episodes per 'duration' in future reports. He explained that, knowing if a child went missing for a few hours or days was a good indicator of the level of risk the child was being exposed.

In the current year, 500 Return Home Interviews (RHI's) were offered to CLA. That was above 95% of the key performance target. 241 RHI's were completed. Some children were offered 1 RHI to cover multiple missing episodes. That was done when children were frequently reported missing for short periods.

The Head of Integrated Adolescent Safeguarding Services discussed the 3 case studies in the report.

A list of organisations that provided exploitation training/workshops to children in care and care leavers would be sent to the Integrated Adolescent Safeguarding Services.

**Action: Participation and Mentoring
Lead**

8. Corporate Parenting Strategy refresh for 2024

This item was deferred to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Group.

9. Round Up

NOT DISCUSSED

The meeting closed at 8.08 PM.