An update on the recommendations from the Corporate Parenting Scrutiny of January 2016 and an overview of Looked after Children performance

Report of the Director of Operations, Children's Care and Support Service

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<td><strong>Summary:</strong> The Children’s Service Select Committee undertook a Scrutiny on Corporate Parenting between November 2015 and January 2016 and made recommendations that would support the embedding of the notion of the corporate parenting role amongst Members. This report provides an update on the recommendations. It also provides an overview of the performance outcomes of looked after children in line with one of the recommendations.</td>
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**Recommendations**

The Committee is recommended to:

(i) Note the progress made on the recommendations from the scrutiny on Corporate Parenting that took place during November 2015 and January 2016; and

(ii) Note the performance outcomes for looked after children for 2015 – 16.

**Reasons**

All Members and Officers are described as corporate parents to the children and young people looked after by Barking and Dagenham Council. The Member Corporate Parenting Panel (MCPP) meets regularly and has a programme of work that enables Members and partners to ensure that the work of the Council and partners is effective and achieving best outcomes for our looked after children and young people.

The Children’s Services Select Committee scrutiny enabled a greater understanding of the work and outcomes of the MCPP and also provided support to the broadening of the corporate parenting role to wider Members.

1. **Introduction and Background**

1.1 In June 2015, the Children's Service Select Committee (CSSC) agreed to undertake a scrutiny of Corporate Parenting over the course of three meetings in the municipal year 2015-16. The Committee met on 16 November 2015 and received a report
from the (former) Corporate Director of Children’s Services on Corporate Parenting followed by a discussion with the former Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and Social Care and also the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel. Information was provided on the governance arrangements in place across the Local Authority and the various services and arrangements in place to monitor the progress and developments of children in care. In January 2016, a workshop took place attended by CSSC Members and the Cabinet Member for Children’s Service and Social Care. A focus of the session was ‘how best to embed corporate parenting into the mindset of all council Members’. An outcome of the Scrutiny was a set of recommendations. An update on the implementation the recommendations is given at Appendix 1.

2. Overview of LAC Performance Outcomes and Key Trends for 2015-16

2.1 This section of the report draws on information that has been produced for the Corporate Parenting Annual Report that is due to be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel on 2 September 2016. The Service produces annual reports on its performance on Adoption and and Fostering. These are presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

2.2 Numbers of Children in Care

2.3 There has been a reduction in the total of children looked after in care from 457 at March 2015 to 418 at March 2016. This means that the rate per 10,000 children has fallen from 77 to 71 but continues to be higher than the London average of 52, national average of 60 and statistical neighbours of 69 per 10,000 children.

2.4 The demographic profile of the Borough highlights that the number of children is increasing by 2 to 3% each year. There are also high rates of domestic violence and deprivation which will impact on families. The reduction in the total number of looked after children is therefore a positive trend when considered in this context. Services continue to give close attention to support to families to avoid children coming in to care when safe and appropriate and consider alternative options.

Figure 4 Rate of looked after children per 10,000 by year
3. Where Children in Care are Placed

3.1 A total of 344 (82.2%) children were placed in family based care through foster care, placement with adoptive carers or placement with parents. The % of children placed within the Borough has increased from 37.7% at the year end of 2014-15 to 40% at the end of 2015-16. It is important to note that there are also a lot of foster carers who live in neighbouring boroughs such as Havering. High numbers of children continue to be cared for in family based care within or nearby to the Borough which can be beneficial for the children in maintaining links with family and services, including schools.

3.2 The number of children placed in residential care has fallen from 45 to 35 over the course of the year as appropriate arrangements have been put in place for moving on in their care plans.

3.3 More young people are living in semi-independent placements – increased from 32 to 39 - as part of plans to move towards leaving care and adulthood.

3.4 There has been a slight decrease - from 67 to 65 - in the number of children who are placed 20 miles plus from home. It is sometimes necessary to place further away to achieve the placement to meet the child’s needs.

3.5 The number of children adopted in this period has gone down from 32 in 2014-15 to 27 in 2015-16. This is the third highest amongst the London boroughs. Performance, including the timeliness of achieving adoption, has been affected by rulings on cases in the courts and by the challenges in finding a suitable match for children who are hard to place. The adoptions achieved have included numbers of ‘hard to place’ children who are older, have a disability, are part of a sibling group or from a minority ethnic background.

3.6 The number of children being made the subject of Special Guardianship Orders has increased from seven in 2010-2011 to 33 in 2015-2016. This is another form of permanency that is considered alongside adoption and long term fostering. The special guardianship arrangements often mean staying within the wider family network or continuity of care from foster carers.

3.7 The figures highlight that Special Guardianship Orders have become increasingly popular within care proceedings. Significant numbers of children have therefore been supported to have plans for permanency through adoption or special guardianship as alternative arrangements to long term care.

4. Placement Stability

4.1 The stability of placements is very important for children and is a good basis for achieving positive outcomes. There are two measures of placement stability which give information about the moves of placement over periods of time:

a) Short Term placement stability (Former NI 62) - The % of children with three or more placements during the year fell slightly from 13% (60/457 children) in 2014-
2015 to 12% (50/418 children) in 2015-2016. We are now in line with the London average, but above the Statistical Neighbours average (11%) and national average (10%).

b) Long Term placement stability (Former NI 63) – the % of children in care for at least 2.5 years and in the same placement for the last two years, increased slightly from 59.1% in 2015 (81/137) to 59.9% (82/137) in 2015. However, this area of performance is below all comparators – London 66%, SN 69% and national average 68%. This is a key area of practice activity for action in the 2016-17 period with further attention to the matching of children with carers/placement and guidance for social workers about permanency planning.

5. Data on Gender, Ethnicity and Age

5.1 The percentage of female looked after children is 49% and though this is above the national position of 45%, our figures reflect the proportionate gender split in the wider child population of the Borough. There was a 7% decrease in the under 10 year olds in care in 2015/16 (falling from 41% to 34%). This is lower than the local population (64% are under 10 years old) and lower than the national average for LAC (41%).

5.2 By ethnicity, compared to March 2015, there was a 3% increase in the number of White British children being cared for by the Local Authority in 2015-16 – rising from 47% to 50%. We are also seeing an increasing trend of Eastern European families featuring in our care statistics (increasing from 9% to 11% over the last year, and 6% in 2012), and Albanian young people are over-represented in Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker figures.

5.3 In 2015-16, there were a total of 176 young people who were care leavers and aged 18 and over in the Borough which is an increase on the 154 in the previous year.

6. Health of Children in Care

6.1 There is close working with the designated Doctor and Nurse for Looked after Children. Children in care have initial health assessments within 28 days of admission to care and then review health assessments – every six months if child is under five and annually if child is over five. It is important to note that whilst the aim is for all children to benefit from the range of health related checks some children choose not to attend for appointments arranged despite the efforts of those involved. Progress about the checks and any findings are discussed as part of the child’s review meeting. Performance about health related checks has been positive with the great majority of children receiving checks:

a) There was an improvement in the number of children receiving medicals which increased from 75% to 82% for children over 2015-16 period.

b) There was also improvement in the number of children who have been in care for over one year having up to date health checks – increased from 92% to 94%.
c) Up to date dental checks for children improved from 80% to 85%.

d) The number of up to date eye checks for children reduced slightly from 77% to 75.5%

7. **Education Attainment**

7.1 The results of tests and exams for children and young people in care from 2011 to 2015 are shown in the table below:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children looked after Key Stage 2 - % Reading Level 4+</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>71.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children looked after Key Stage 2 - % Maths Level 4+</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>67.0</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>64.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children looked after Key Stage 2 - % Writing Level 4+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>67.0</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>61.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children looked after Key Stage 2 - % Reading, Writing &amp; Maths Level 4+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>52.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children looked after Key Stage 2 - % Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling Level 4+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>67.0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children looked after GCSE - % 5+ A*-C</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children looked after GCSE - % 5+ A*-C inc. English &amp; Maths</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>13.8</td>
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7.2 These show that the Key Stage 4 results from 2014-15 were above the all England and London results for looked after children. However, the national result for 5 x A*-C stands at 64% so there is still a considerable gap that needs closing. The results are also in the top third of London boroughs for the children’s Key Stage 2 results. Grammar, punctuation and spelling is clearly a strength of our students. Writing appears to be the weakest area and the Virtual School, a school that considers all the needs of looked after children as a ‘virtual’ single cohort, will be liaising with our English Advisory colleagues to ensure that the Borough’s looked after children students are supported.

8. **Education, Employment and Training for Young People**

8.1 It is very important that as our looked after children leave school that they enter into education, employment or training (EET). Through this their life chances will be improved as they move into adulthood. The performance regarding EET of young people aged 16-21 is monitored and at the end of 2015-16 was 50%. This is a decrease from 54% as at the end 2014-15. This is below the London average of
53% for the 2014-15 period but above the national average of 48% and statistical neighbours average of 48% for that period.

In the period of 2015-16 there were 22 young people attending university.

9. **Suitable Accommodation**

9.1 As at the end of the 2015-16 period there were 77% of young people who were care leavers and in suitable accommodation – this has reduced from 80% as at the end of 2014-15. It is important to bear in mind that the situation is affected by a number of factors including young people being in custody. Those in custody are recorded as not being in suitable accommodation. We continue to be reliant on private rented market and landlords offering care and support packages to the Local Authority so that there are ‘move on’ plans from foster care and residential children’s homes.

10. **Implications**

As this report is for information, there are no implications arising directly from this report.

**List of appendices:**

Appendix 1 Update report on the Recommendations arising from the CSSC working on Corporate Parenting of 18 Jan 2016.