

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

6 OCTOBER 2008

Chairman: * Councillor Janet Mote

Councillors: * Husain Akhtar * Mitzi Green
* Miss Christine Bednell * Eric Silver
* Mrs Margaret Davine

* Denotes Member present

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL**PART II - MINUTES**53. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance at this meeting.

54. **Declarations of Interest:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no declarations of interests made by Members in relation to the business transacted at this meeting.

55. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

RESOLVED: That all items be considered with the press and public present.

56. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 31 July be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

57. **Matters Arising:****Item 50: Development of a Special Interest Group with Young People**

The Chairman reported that Adeline Abraham of the Young Voices' group for Children Looked After (CLA) was in the process of arranging the membership of the proposed Special Interest Group. Nominations for group members were currently taking place, although no timescale had been agreed.

The Chairman reminded Members that, due to the work the Corporate Parenting Panel would be undertaking with Looked After Children, it was important that all individuals were CRB checked. She reported that all Panel Members had now received a letter with information regarding the process and that they should contact Debbie Perrin, Shared Services Manager, who would coordinate all applications.

Item 51: Government White Paper "Care Matters – Time for Change"

The Chairman welcomed the Head Teacher of Shaftesbury High School, Mr Paul Williams, who had taken on the role of one of three 'Virtual Head Teachers'. The Virtual Head Teacher scheme was to be funded using the Care Matters grant and the Chairman invited Mr Williams to explain the new role in more detail.

Mr Williams explained that the scheme entailed a senior individual working for the local authority, tasked with raising, developing and maintaining the educational standards of children in care. Mr Williams reported that he had met with a number of officers, including the Senior Children Looked After Co-Ordinator and the Performance Manager for Children & Adults, and had identified and contacted the school with the highest number of Looked After Children. He explained that, by working with the school, they hoped to analyse the issues surrounding the educational achievements of Looked After Children and develop the Virtual Head Teacher scheme accordingly. During these early stages, Mr Williams stated that he or one of the other two Virtual Head Teachers would regularly provide feedback to the Corporate Parenting Panel so that they could oversee its development.

Following questions from Panel Members, Mr Williams explained that:

- the Virtual Head Teacher scheme would aim to address many issues that influenced a Looked After Child's educational development, including bullying. However, the scheme was designed to complement a school's existing

arrangements and issues such as bullying would still be dealt with using a school's internal procedures;

- the Virtual Head Teachers planned to consider both qualitative and quantitative data and would work with a range of agencies including community groups and the police;
- the Virtual Head Teacher scheme would build upon the existing Individual Learning Plans (ILP) of schools by providing additional support and guidance where necessary;
- the Virtual Head Teachers would remain anonymous to the children they were monitoring.

Item 52: Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice:

The Chairman recommended that, in order to raise awareness of the Council's Corporate Parenting responsibilities, a copy of the book entitled "Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice" be given to every Harrow Councillor. Following a discussion between Members and officers, it was decided that a letter would be sent with the book, explaining its purpose and requesting feedback.

A Panel Member suggested that the distribution of the book be arranged in conjunction with the proposed Corporate Parenting training that was to be organised by the Member Development team. The Senior Children Looked After Co-Ordinator stated that he had not yet been contacted by the Member Development team but that he would look into the matter.

A Panel Member stated that it had been agreed at a previous meeting that the Corporate Parenting Panel would have a display placed outside the Council Chamber at a future Council Meeting. She explained that the purpose of the proposed exhibit was to raise Councillors' awareness of Corporate Parenting. However, she stated that, following the meeting, no action had been taken. The Chairman informed the Panel that she would discuss the matter with the Senior Children Looked After Co-Ordinator to see whether such a display could be arranged.

58. **Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations:**

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put, or petitions or deputations received at this meeting under the provisions of Committee Procedure Rules 19, 16 and 17 respectively.

59. **INFORMATION REPORT - Activity and Performance:**

The Panel received an information report of the Corporate Director of Children's Services, setting out key data relating to Children Looked After (CLA) and Children on the Child Protection Register (CPR), including key performance indicators up to the end of August 2008. The Performance Manager for Children & Adults tabled an additional document detailing CLA Key Stage results for the periods 2006-07 and 2007-08.

The Performance Manager for Children & Adults informed the Panel that due to the relatively low number of CLA in Harrow's school system, the data regarding Key Stage results could be misleading as small fluctuations impacted significantly upon the final percentages. The officer reported that achievement in Key Stage 2 Science in 2008 was better than in 2007, although attainment of 5 GCSE grades had fallen. He added that such fluctuations were to be expected when dealing with small sample sizes and that statistics alone could not always provide a comprehensive overview of the situation.

The Performance Manager for Children & Adults commented that the purpose of Virtual Head Teachers and the Care Matters White Paper were to help combat the underlying and often complex factors that impacted upon the educational achievement of Looked After Children. It was hoped that these schemes would also help local authorities develop a better understanding of the challenges Looked After Children faced by moving away from purely quantitative analysis.

Following questions from Members of the Panel, the Performance Manager for Children & Adults stated that:

- information regarding Looked After Childrens' attainment of less standard qualifications such as diplomas was available and would be included in future data;

- the Fischer Family Trust was a project that aimed to provide analyses and data to help LEAs and schools make more effective use of pupil performance data. Using this information, the Council could set expectations and targets for Looked After Children. However, it was accepted that the educational prospects of Looked After Children were often influenced by a multitude of factors that were hard to predict;
- the Council tried to track Looked After Children once they reached the age of 18 in order to monitor their subsequent achievements in relation to both education and employment. This data was then compared against data from the general population to identify disparities;

The Performance Manager for Children & Adults provided the Panel with a summary of other key performance issues that had been identified:

- health and dental checks for Looked After Children had reached 96.4% which was higher than the national average;
- despite showing as red, adoptions were on track to reach the Council's 14% target;
- there had been 2 Looked After Children identified as having a conviction, final warning or reprimand. Whilst not ideal, the number was below the level expected;
- participation of CLA in reviews had increased to 99% for the first quarter. This was above the national average;
- there was some concern that the number of CLA was being miscalculated due to the way in which children attending residential schools were defined. The matter was being investigated to ensure that the information was as accurate as possible.

In response to a request from a Member for more detailed breakdown of the data contained within the report, the Performance Manager for Children & Adults stated that a more comprehensive data analysis could be provided, and that members could directly request any specific analysis they would like to see.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

60. **INFORMATION REPORT - Care Matters Update - Harrow's response to the Children and Young Persons Bill 2007:**

The Panel received an information report of the Corporate Director of Children's Services to update it on Harrow's response to the Children and Young Persons Bill 2007. The Senior Children Looked After Co-Ordinator informed the Panel that the purpose of the Bill was to reform and strengthen the statutory framework around the care system. He explained that the Bill contained a range of initiatives and provisions designed to enable CLA to receive high quality care. The report considered how Harrow would have to alter its current practices to ensure that it was compliant with the Bill, expected to receive Royal Assent in 2008.

The Senior Children Looked After Co-Ordinator highlighted the key areas where the Council had or was due to invest money:

- an Education Welfare Officer (EWO) for CLA had been appointed;
- the Council was in the process of recruiting a Personal Education Plan (PEP) Coordinator;
- three Virtual Head Teachers had been appointed;
- additional tutoring for Looked After Children was being considered;
- the Achievement Payments scheme was to be broadened to include effort, attendance as well as achievement;
- as required by the Bill, the Council would pay a bursary of £2000 to Looked After Children leaving the care system and enrolling onto a Higher Education course.

The officer added that the Bill placed a new duty on Local Authorities to appoint an Independent Visitor for all Looked After Children but that this service was to be provided by the Harrow Association of Voluntary Services (HAVS).

A Member stated that rewarding Looked After Children for both effort and achievement was important. She informed the Panel that the Council used to run a CLA Achievement Awards ceremony during which the Mayor would present individuals with certificates. She suggested that the scheme could be revived and funded using the Care Matters grant. Another Member agreed that the scheme would be beneficial but suggested that, with so many other proposals requiring a share of the grant, funding be sought from elsewhere. The Chairman broadly supported the idea and stated that it was important that schemes incorporated all Looked After Children, including those that did not do well educationally. The Senior Children Looked After Co-Ordinator informed the Panel that he was in the process of costing and would therefore look to see whether such a scheme was feasible. However, he noted that difficult decisions would have to be made and reminded the Panel that funding was limited.

A Member asked whether the venue for the proposed Homework Club for Looked After Children had been decided. The Senior Children Looked After Co-Ordinator reported that the Helix Centre had been chosen as the preferred location, although some details such as travel arrangements had yet to be finalised.

Summing up, the Senior Children Looked After Co-Ordinator reported that the Council was well placed to meet the requirements of the Children and Young Persons Bill 2007, although he reminded the Panel that the Council was still waiting for it to receive Royal Assent. In the meantime, he reported that the London-Wide Pledge for Looked After Children had been finalised and that it would act as a blueprint for the provision of efficient and effective care. The officer informed the Panel that he would provide an update at the next Corporate Parenting Panel meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

61. **Any Other Urgent Business:**

Adoption Inspection:

Peter Tolley, Service Manager for Family Placements, reported that Ofsted had recently finished their adoption inspection and that inspectors had spent 4 days speaking to Councillors, officers and checking the Council's paperwork. The findings had been generally positive and had praised the use of permanent staff and strong management. One area that had been identified as requiring additional work was the Council's post-adoption support facilities. The officer stated that the final grade had been "Satisfactory".

Despite disappointment that the Council had not achieved a grade of "Good", the Service Manager for Family Placements stated that the narrative of the report had been positive and that many other boroughs had fared similarly. In closing, he assured the Panel that the issues that had been raised were being addressed.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 6.05 pm, closed at 7.24 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JANET MOTE
Chairman

Appendix 1**Officers in
attendance:**

David Harrington

Performance Manager for Children
& Adults

Andreas Kyriacou

Senior Co-ordinator, Children
Looked After

Peter Tolley

Service Manager for Family
Placements