

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL MINUTES

21 JULY 2010

Chairman: * Councillor Mitzi Green

Councillors: * Husain Akhtar * Janet Mote
* Christine Bednell * Raj Ray (2)
* Brian Gate (1)

* Denotes Member present
(1) and (2) Denote category of Reserve Members

1. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note the attendance of the following duly appointed Reserve Members:

Ordinary Member

Councillor Margaret Davine
Councillor William Stoodley

Reserve Member

Councillor Brian Gate
Councillor Raj Ray

2. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that there were no declarations of interests made.

3. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

RESOLVED: To appoint Councillor Christine Bednell as Vice-Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel for the 2010/2011 Municipal Year.

4. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 April 2010, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

5. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions or petitions were received or deputations put at this meeting.

6. INFORMATION REPORT - Activity and Performance

An officer introduced a report of the Corporate Director Children's Services, which set out key data relating to Children Looked After (CLA) and Children with Child Protection Plans (CPP). He added that the report also included performance against the National Indicators for Children's Social Care for the end of May 2010.

The officer advised that:

- the number of CPP were higher than CLA cases. This could be a result of the heightened awareness of recent high profile cases nationwide;
- the number of CLA cases had fallen as a result of the extensive work being carried out across the Children's Services department including family support and adoptions. Significant pressure from increased referrals has contributed to a deterioration in performance in assessment timescales for both the 7 day and newly introduced 10 day thresholds. Management action was being taken;
- there were thirteen adoptions in 2009 which was 14% of eligible CLA. This was above the national average of 11%. The children adopted in 2009 were below ten years of age.

In response to questions by Members, officers advised that:

- the Council sought to support and maintain contact with all care leavers. Officers had identified that approximately 50% required financial support;
- a report detailing the average cost per CLA would be reported to a future Corporate Parenting Panel meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

7. INFORMATION REPORT - Harrow's Independent Reviewing Officer Service Annual Report 2008/2009

An officer introduced a report which set out to appraise the Panel of the annual Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO) report, 2008/09.

The officer advised that:

- the IRO had implemented changes in order to make the protocol for resolving disputes more effective. Any issues identified by the protocol would initially involve the IRO and the respective Team Manager. If a dispute had not reached a satisfactory conclusion, it would be elevated to a senior management level to seek a resolution;
- examples of the 61 protocols initiated in the twelve months covered by the annual report included missing or incomplete paperwork, and visits that were not maintained at a statutory or agreed level;
- if appropriate, IRO's could refer a case to the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service, (CAFCASS) to determine whether legal action against an offending authority would be appropriate;
- no cases have required a referral to CAFCASS. Occasionally, the IRO manager has had discussions with the relevant Divisional Director which have resulted in a resolution of the dispute.

In response to questions by Members, officers advised that:

- appropriate methods of cover were in place when the IRO Manager had taken statutory leave. This would maintain contact between the relevant officers and the IRO;
- health targets for Children Looked After were being met. Each child received an annual health assessment as well as optician appointments and vaccinations when required.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

8. INFORMATION REPORT - Foster Carer Training

An officer introduced a report of the Corporate Director Children's Services, which highlighted recent developments in Foster Care Training.

In response to questions by Members, officers advised that:

- social workers would initially visit potential foster carers. If the social worker was satisfied that the individual was suitable, a two stage process would be conducted thereafter. The initial stage would require the prospective foster carer to attend a four day course delivered in accordance with a nationally recognised programme, they would then undergo a four month home assessment. The final stage would

require prospective foster carers to be presented to the Fostering Panel, who would determine whether they felt the candidate was suitable to become a registered foster carer. The Fostering Panel would determine the foster carer's registration details in terms of the numbers, ages and additional needs of the children they would be asked to provide care for. These stages, in addition to an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check, medical assessments and other statutory measures, would determine whether the candidate would be approved to become a Foster carer;

- gender, ethnicity and religion were all taken into account when matching carers to meet the individual needs and circumstances of each child;
- family members and friends were approached before a child is placed in foster care, to identify whether a kinship solution would be suitable;
- the Annual Needs Assessment (ANA) was a performance tool used to identify and analyse any demographic changes in the care population. This was used to assist with service planning to ensure that the recruitment and training of foster carers was well matched to the needs and circumstances of the CLA requiring care now and in the future.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

9. INFORMATION REPORT - Teenage Placement Strategy

An officer introduced a report of the Corporate Director Children's Services, which outlined the Teenage Placement Strategy reported to Cabinet on 15 July 2010. She advised that consideration regarding the change of use of a Residential Care Unit formed one of the key aspects of the overall strategy. One of the key proposals under consideration, and subject to a stakeholder consultation process, was to change the current residential care unit into a semi-independent support unit. She added that the focus of the strategy was on improving services for teenagers requiring an improved choice of placements and support to meet their needs and circumstances.

The officer advised that:

- the residential unit was a relatively newly built property that was previously managed in partnership with the Shaftsbury Young People Charity. The management team from the charity had since been brought in-house in order to reduce costs;
- the residential unit did not provide on-site education, therapeutic or specialist intervention for its residents;
- the option agreed by Cabinet was best suited in the long-term to the emerging Children Looked After (CLA) demographics. The proposal for a semi-independent support unit would better meet the needs of older looked after young people to help them acquire independent

living skills as part of their transition to full independence and young adulthood.

In response to questions by Members, officers advised that:

- a review of the children's placement service had been completed by Capita and the management team in 2009/10. Consideration was given to the financial and operational records of all relevant placements and provisions managed or commissioned by the Council and recommendations had been made;
- stakeholder consultation on the strategy would be undertaken with residents at the unit as well as with their parents, guardians and carers, plus staff, union representatives, partners and professionals.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

10. Any Other Urgent Business

The Panel discussed items that they wished to be submitted to future meetings.

RESOLVED: That the following reports be presented to a future meeting of the Panel:

- an update on the work conducted by Virtual Headteachers, with an emphasis on evaluating the educational progress of children looked after by the Local Authority;
- care leavers performing a presentation for all Councillors.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 6.00 pm, closed at 7.35 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR MITZI GREEN
Chairman