

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL MINUTES

10 JANUARY 2012

Chairman: * Councillor Mitzi Green

Councillors: * Christine Bednell * Janet Mote
* Margaret Davine * John Nickolay (1)
* Brian Gate

* Denotes Member present
(1) Denotes category of Reserve Members

54. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Member:-

Ordinary Member

Councillor Lynda Seymour

Reserve Member

Councillor John Nickolay

55. Declarations of Interest

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

56. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2011 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

57. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put, or petitions or deputations received.

RESOLVED ITEMS

58. INFORMATION REPORT - Activity and Performance

Officers introduced a report which set out key data relating to Children Looked After (CLA) and Children with Child Protection Plans (CPP), plus performance position for key indicators relating to Children's Social Care.

The officer reported that there was no new information that had not been presented to the Panel previously, other than the further numbers of CLA with a Child Protection Plan.

During the discussion on this item, Members of the Panel raised a number of queries which were responded to by officers as follows:

- the reason for a decline in the number of Asian CLA was linked to a drop in the number of asylum seekers within the borough. This had a direct impact on these figures;
- information relating to CLA by gender was collected on a monthly basis. If there were any which were not known this was investigated and clarified before the next months figures were collected;
- there were a number of key priority indicators and targeted action plans to address practice and performance;
- in relation to CLA, the position placement strategy had improved significantly. However there was still evidence of instability particularly in relation to the number of planned moves within a year and the duration a child remained in a long term placement. Having analysed these issues, it was clear that they were related to the fact that most of CLA were teenagers who were the most challenging;
- there was more robust scrutiny and tracking of placement moves and review. In so far as it was possible, planned moves were always preferable to disruption moves. The Council always sought to minimise disruption placements;
- it was envisaged that the newly appointed Virtual Headteacher (VHT) would lead on and co-ordinate education for CLA. The VHT would be conducting research and presenting her findings on key areas and on what needed addressing. This would be presented to the Panel at a future meeting. An action plan would be then developed to deliver improvements;
- there was currently no appointed CLA doctor. Discussions with North West London Hospitals NHS Trust on this issue were currently ongoing and it was hoped that a positive outcome would be reached. It was envisaged that there would be a report for the Panel on this issue at a future meeting;

- the current national economic climate was a major factor in relation to the number of young people currently unemployed. It was possible that there could also be data reporting issues because of changes to local arrangements. This was an issue that would be investigated by officers and the VHT. Getting young people into employment was a key outcome;
- if a CLA had 3 or more moves in the yearly reporting period then this was recorded for the Key Performance Indicator. It was important to note that whilst some may have related to emergency moves, some were also related to planned moves for e.g. in a plan agreed before a court;
- each CLA was tracked individually. If a CLA had more than 3 moves in consecutive years, there were statutory requirements in relation to reviewing their situation. The Council were currently caring for a number of challenging young people and this was not a scenario that had been encountered;
- it was important for CLA to develop stability within themselves otherwise this could exacerbate any underlying issues. This is why the Council always aimed to avoid unplanned moves.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

59. Housing for Children Looked After who are Leaving Local Authority Care

The Panel received a report discussing issues relating to housing support for CLA who were leaving Local Authority care.

The Chairman announced that the Portfolio Holder for Housing had been invited to the meeting but had submitted his apologies as he had a prior commitment.

An officer reported that the Panel had previously requested this report. There were a large amount of teenagers who were categorised as Children Looked After (CLA). It was a known fact that CLA faced a number of social issue such as being overrepresented in prisons, persons who were homeless etc. Housing support was also an issue. It had been proved that this support was crucial for educational attainment, employment prospects etc.

The officer explained that resources were an issue. 22 allocated properties had been reserved for care leavers in 2011. However in 2012 it was expected that there would be 38 care leavers eligible for housing support.

Work had been conducted between departments within the Council to develop solutions to the issues. It was important to recognise however that there were a number of different categories of vulnerable people who were all bidding for the same housing needs.

During the discussion on this item, Members of the Panel raised a number of queries which were responded to by officers as follows:

- young people in housing were entitled to their own tenancy and this was not time limited. From experience there was not much mobility once young people had been granted a tenancy. This was usually due to the fact that they developed local connections, support and relationships;
- if a young person's circumstances changed and they were granted tenancy for a different accommodation, the accommodation they previously occupied would revert back for inclusion in a general housing pool;
- if there was no relevant social housing to offer young people they would stay in foster care or alternative provisions would be made;
- building further places to accommodate CLA and young people leaving care was difficult. The private sector could be utilised but this could involve a subsidy being paid to provide stability to those relevant young people;
- within the current arrangements, if extra places were provided for CLA and care leavers, this could impact on other categories of vulnerable people waiting for similar housing needs;
- the report detailed alternative housing options that could be considered in order to address the current position. This involved establishing partnerships with Registered Social Landlords to move into the privately rented sector. Views had been expressed that this could develop less secure tenancies and be more expensive. Protocols could be established to address these issues and uphold the Council's duty as Corporate Parents. One other option could also involve investigating the possibility of shared accommodation;
- some Registered Social Landlords already provided housing support to young people. If further RSLs were required this would probably involve a procurement exercise;
- semi-independent provisions in relation to housing support were fully utilised by the Council. These providers may wish to enter any future procurement exercise;
- the Council worked with Young People with an aim for them to achieve full independence. It was important to note that there were a number of bulge years for CLA which the Council were currently in the midst of. However the situation would improve. The Council had been successful in care planning and providing effective care for babies and young children;

- there were no current funding streams that the Council could utilise to assist young people in providing housing support. This was an issue that officers had investigated.

During the discussion on this item, Members of the Panel made a number of comments including the following:

- it was accepted that current housing stock was low. It was important to look at other options which would be long term in nature and sustainable;
- enquiries would be made to investigate whether a former mayoral charity fund could make some donations to assist in helping providing essential items to care leavers to assist alleviate with some of the pressures of setting up a home.

The Panel then analysed the proposed recommendations as part of the report to provide guidance on future subsequent Cabinet or Portfolio Holder decision making arrangements. The Panel agreed that the issues to be determined involved the Portfolio Holder for Housing. Some of these would therefore be highlighted to him.

RESOLVED: That

(1) the following issues be noted in consideration on future Cabinet or Portfolio Holder Decisions:

- the Panel's support of financial assistance being provided by the Council to enable care leavers to set up home;
- the Panel's support of the collective endeavours of Care Leavers and Housing Sub-Group of the CLA Life Chances Forum and task them with the responsibility for developing clear operational systems and processes for monitoring and reviewing how the housing needs and circumstances will be addressed by the Council;

(2) the following issues be highlighted to the Portfolio Holder for Housing:

- the Panel's support to increase the Locata Housing Scheme allocation for Care Leavers from 22 to 38 in 2012 and to review future demand on an annual basis in line with the regular corporate planning cycle;
- the Panel's support to explore opportunities in the privately rented sector in order to develop partnerships with Registered Social Landlords as a way of addressing current housing resource pressures for care leavers;
- The Panel's support to note the questionnaire feedback from care leavers regarding the suitability and provision of housing

provided under the Locata Housing Scheme in order to establish a minimum quality standards in the future.

60. Display for Councillors

The Panel received a report which set out proposals to set up a display publicising the work of Corporate Parenting and Beyond Limits (Harrow's Children in Care Council) at the Full Council meeting on 12 April 2012.

An officer explained that a similar event had taken place last year and it was intended that this took place on a yearly basis. The event provided an ideal opportunity for Members to meet with young people.

It was hoped that there would be strong support for the event and that Members of the Panel would assist in promoting the event and display amongst their fellow Members.

It was envisaged that the event would commence at approximately 6.15 pm. The event and display would be publicised and it was envisaged that there would be 7 young people in attendance between the age range of 14-20 years old.

The Chairman commented that this was an important event as every Member was a corporate parent and hoped that it would be well supported by Members.

RESOLVED: That the Panel request the Corporate Director of Children's Services to set up a display for Councillors, by members of Corporate Parenting and Beyond Limits, on 12 April 2012 prior to the Full Council meeting.

61. INFORMATION REPORT - Corporate Parenting Panel Work Programme 2011/12

The Chairman introduced a report setting out the work programme for the Panel for the current municipal year. The Chairman reported the following:

- there would be a further report presented to the Panel on 3 April 2012 relating to cultural opportunities for Children Looked After. The Portfolio Holder for Community and Culture would also be invited to the meeting;
- the Virtual Headteacher (VHT) would be providing a report presenting her findings on key educational areas for CLA and on what needed addressing. This would be presented to the Panel at its meeting on 3rd April 2012;
- health issues relating to CLR and Care leavers would be an issue that would be presented to the Panel on 10 July 2012;

- it was also envisaged that a report would be presented at a future meeting on the outcomes from the recent consultation on the life skills programme.

The Chairman also commented that she would continue to work with Democratic Services and Children's Services in preparing the agendas for future meetings.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

62. Further Announcements

The Chairman announced that a report would be presented to Cabinet on 9 February 2012 relating to increasing the profile of the Panel. An officer explained that the Children's Services directorate had recently undergone a major redesign to launch a new operating model. As part of this consideration had been provided to strengthen the role of the Panel and demonstrating its impact.

It had therefore been proposed that there would be a revised officer group supporting the Panel. This would include the doctor assigned to look after CLA if, as discussed previously, there was agreement reached on this issue.

It had also been proposed that there would be greater emphasis on engagement in a more meaningful way with young people. This could potentially involve engaging with them in different environments, setting up more informal ways for them to speak to Members and playing a greater role in facilitating issues.

RESOLVED: That the items be noted.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 6.00 pm, closed at 7.26 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR MITZI GREEN
Chairman

Officer Attendance:

Jon Dalton - Service Manager - Housing Needs

Catherine Halsall - Virtual Headteacher

Gail Hancock – Divisional Director Safeguarding and Family Support

Nick Crick – Service Manager Children in Need & Looked After Service

Andreas Kyriacou - Quality Assurance Manager, Vulnerable Children

Dipika Patel - Senior Professional Performance & Data, Childrens Social Care

Jackie Souter - Housing Provision Manager

Peter Tolley – Service Manager Placement Services