

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES

10 JULY 2012

Chairman: * Councillor Mitzi Green

Councillors: * Christine Bednell * Janet Mote
* Margaret Davine * Lynda Seymour
* Brian Gate

In attendance: 2 representatives of Beyond Limits (Children in Care Council)

* Denotes Member present

73. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

74. Declarations of Interest

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

75. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 April 2012, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

76. Terms of Reference of the Corporate Parenting Panel

The Panel considered their term of reference and the Chair, in reviewing the membership, reminded officers of the need for 2 Children Looked After and 2 Foster Carers as members of the Panel and requested that this be pursued.

In light of the recent Ofsted report and the importance of Corporate Parenting, the Chair proposed that future meetings of the Panel be moved to the later time of 7.30 pm in order to give more time for discussion. She further proposed that there be an informal briefing with young people prior to the Panel meeting.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) officers be requested to identify 2 Children Looked After and 2 Foster Carers in order to formally appoint them as members of the Panel;
- (2) future meetings of the Panel commence at 7.30 pm with an informal briefing held with young people held at 7.00 pm;
- (3) the Panel's terms of reference be noted and confirmed.

77. Appointment of Vice Chair

RESOLVED: To appoint Councillor Christine Bednell as Vice-Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel for the 2012/2013 Municipal Year.

78. Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were received.

79. Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received at this meeting under the provisions of the Executive Procedure Rule 49 (Part 4D of the Constitution).

80. Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received at this meeting under the provisions of Executive Procedure Rule 50 (Part 4D of the Constitution).

RESOLVED ITEMS

81. INFORMATION REPORT - Annual Independent Reviewing Officers' Report 1 January 2011 - 31 December 2011

The Panel received a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Families which provided a context for how the work of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service (IRO) was undertaken in Harrow and summarised the issues that had arisen in the last 12 month period.

An officer drew Members' attention to the changes to the role of the IRO and referred to Ofsted report which stated, amongst other issues, that there was a need for officers to challenge themselves and also the need to make a real

difference to children. He added that a survey of all Children Looked After was being undertaken and peer audits would also be arranged.

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

- There was sufficient capacity to deal with additional cases should the need arise and a further 2 Child Protection Chairs had been recruited.
- In relation to participation by parents at reviews, this was a sensitive area as an employer might not be aware that an employee had a Looked After Child and there was a need for flexibility. There had, however, been few instances of a parent stating that they could not attend a review.
- Under the Regulations, 20 days was a requirement for report resolution but there would be more analysis in the next report.
- The officer reported that negative responses from a CLA were followed up but these may relate to the individual's own personal circumstances. Urgent matters would be looked into immediately. Officers would also be piloting exit type interviews with children leaving the care system. The Interim Divisional Director added that Ofsted had advised that young people had indicated that they had too many changes of social workers and the Council would look to address this.

A Member commented that it was important to carry out Quality Assurance audits in collaboration with partners.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chair welcomed two representatives of Beyond Limits (Children in Care Council) to the meeting. She added that their input would be welcomed.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

82. Annual Health Report on Looked After Children and Care Leavers

The Panel received a report of NHS Harrow, which was the first such report submitted to the Panel. The report provided an update on the work with Looked After Children in Harrow and highlighted health needs and issues for this group and the responsibilities of NHS Harrow in responding to those needs. The report also provided an overview of the service provided for Looked After Children in Harrow and those placed outside of the borough.

The Chair, on behalf of the Panel, welcomed Sue Dixon, Designated Nurse Safeguarding Children to the meeting. Ms Dixon advised that since her appointment she had been looking at the service and felt that there had not always been good communication between the Council and the NHS and that some of the Quality Assurance had not been that good. She went on to highlight the results of the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection.

Members made comments and asked questions which were responded to as follows:

- In terms initial and review health assessments, the Designated Nurse would carry out any health checks. The aim was not use GPs for this as much as they had been in the past.
- In response to a question as to whether there was a short, medium and long term strategy in place to deal with the priorities for 2012/13, the Designated Nurse advised that a strategy should be in place within 3 months with the aim of catching up within 6 months.
- In relation to areas for improvement, a Member queried why needs had not been identified. The Designated Nurse advised that there had been issues with the volume of information received about Children Looked After and GPs may have carried out health assessments without all the relevant information available. From now on, the Designated Doctor would be preparing the health plans.
- A Member commented that the Lead Nurse was excellent at reviews and that it was appreciated that she approached issues from a different angle. A representative of Beyond Limits endorsed the positive comments made in relation to the Lead Nurse.
- A representative of Beyond Limits expressed his surprise that those young people with learning difficulties or mental health issues had not been given the opportunity to comment on their care until relatively late. The Designated Nurse advised that the questionnaire responses had not been fed into the care plans but that this would be addressed.

A Member thanked the Designated Nurse for her open and honest appraisal of the situation.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) an update on the action plan be provided at the Panel's next meeting;
- (2) the report be noted.

83. INFORMATION REPORT - Update from the Virtual Headteacher

In accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, Members agreed to consider an update report from the Virtual Headteacher as urgent for the reasons set out on the supplemental agenda.

The Panel received an information report from the Corporate Director of Children and Families which outline details of the initial review carried out by the Virtual Headteacher (VHT) of Harrow's Virtual School provision prior to December 2011. The report also included an action plan, which had been prepared prior to the recent Ofsted inspection, to address the areas for development identified in that review.

The officer reported that the key action arising from her review was in relation to staffing and their roles and responsibilities. The Divisional Director added that consideration was being given as to how to equip partnership and social workers to ensure that children's attainment was tracked. It was necessary to have documents that informed officers what each individual child required.

In terms of the three areas of responsibility, a Member sought clarification as to how each of these areas was to be addressed. The officer advised that the Council aimed to create a functioning virtual school and to get to the position where young people knew who from that virtual school was most likely to contact them. A representative of Beyond Limits stated that he had been unaware of the existence of the virtual school and headteacher and suggested that it ought to be advertised to social workers. He was also unclear on its role.

In response to comments made, Members requested that officers ensure that young people received information about the virtual school and virtual headteacher and suggested that the start of the new academic year would be an appropriate time to launch it. Members requested that there be a report to their October meeting in order for the Panel to see if there had been any improvement in young people's awareness of the VHT and virtual school and also to hear back from the young people.

Members asked further questions and made comments which were responded to as follows:

- It was important that young people and schools were aware that there was a designated teacher. If all designated teachers were effective and schools were on board a figure head VHT would not be required.
- Every Looked After Child should have a designated teacher.
- It was suggested that as designated teachers were usually relatively senior with many areas to cover, learner mentors could be part of the contact.
- Officers undertook to write to all new Chairs of School Governing Bodies in the Autumn term in order to progress this issue and also to request Headteachers to raise awareness of the designated teacher.
- The Divisional Director indicated that she would give consideration Members, as Corporate Parents, meeting with designated teachers.
- In response to a Member's suggestion that the VHT meet with governing bodies Chairs and clerks, the officer advised that governing bodies should receive a progress report on Looked After Children.
- The Children Looked After webpage would help to ensure that information, such as a list of designated teachers, was accessible.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) there be a report to the October meeting to see if there had been any improvement in young people's awareness of the VHT and virtual school and also to hear back from the young people.

84. INFORMATION REPORT - Activity and Performance

The Panel received an information report which set out key data relating to Children Looked After (CLA) and Child Protection Plans (CPP) together with the performance position for key indicators for Children's Social Care. The officer advised that the recently published Ofsted inspection report set a range of challenges.

The officer outlined the key points set out in the report and advised that whilst additional narrative had been included, he was happy to look at specific indicators in greater depth if Members required. In response to a question in relation to there was an 80% provisional target for placement with foster carers and adoption for 2012/13, he undertook to check the position. He also undertook to provide a further breakdown of the secure accommodation figures.

A Member reported that she had received a leaflet from the London Borough of Tower Hamlets through her door that sought foster carers. Another Member stated that whilst it was important to work with other authorities, he would make enquires as to why Harrow was being leafleted.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and a further report be submitted to the next meeting.

85. Agenda Tracker

The Panel received the latest version of their work programme and made comments as follows:

- The feedback from Housing on care leavers should be reported to the meeting in October and Housing officers should be invited to attend.
- The Portfolio Holder for Housing be invited to attend the next meeting of the Panel.
- It was requested that officers from Housing and Cultural Services be requested to attend future Panel meetings.

The Chair stated that she wanted the Panel to be a forum where young people felt that they could bring forward their issues.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be updated in line with the Panel's comments.

86. Any Other Urgent Business

In accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, the following agenda items were admitted late to the agenda in order to provide Members with the most up to date position:

Celebration of Achievement

An officer reported that there would be a Celebration of Achievement event held on 2 November 2012 at a venue to be confirmed. The event would include a fashion show and an aspect on fusion of cultures.

The Chair commented that holding such an event on a Friday could be problematic for some cultures and requested that an alternative be considered and she be advised accordingly.

Corporate Parent Display for Councillors

Members congratulated Beyond Limits for their display prior to the Full Council meeting held on 5 July 2012. The Chair requested that thanks be conveyed to all those who had participated.

The Chair advised that Members were keen to hear the views of Beyond Limits and other young people and requested that their representatives let officers know if there was any events that they would like Members to attend.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 6.02 pm, closed at 7.37 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR MITZI GREEN
Chairman

Officer Attendance:

Kamini Rambellas – Interim Divisional Director Targeted Services
Catherine Halsall – Virtual Headteacher
Andreas Kyriacou – Quality Assurance Manager, Vulnerable Children
Nick Crick – Service Manager Children Looked After Service
David Harrington – Service Manager, Performance Management
Adeline Abraham – Children in Care Participation Officer