

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES

29 OCTOBER 2012

Chairman: * Councillor Mitzi Green

Councillors: * Husain Akhtar (1) * Lynda Seymour
* Christine Bednell * William Stoodley (1)
* Margaret Davine

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

87. Welcome

The Chair welcomed Ugo Egenti and Ganimete Vucaj, representatives from Beyond Limits, to the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the representatives from Beyond Limits be allowed to speak on all agenda items during the meeting.

88. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Councillor Brian Gate
Councillor Janet Mote

Reserve Member

Councillor William Stoodley
Councillor Husain Akhtar

89. Declarations of Interest

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

90. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2012 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

91. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

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

RESOLVED ITEMS

92. Corporate Parenting Panel Update from NHS Harrow

The Chair welcomed the Designated Doctor and Designated Nurse for Looked After Children from NHS Harrow to the meeting.

The representatives from NHS Harrow provided the Panel with an update on the inspection conducted in Harrow by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in May 2012 and made the following points:

- the inspection conducted had highlighted that improvements were needed in a number of areas including the timeliness and quality of health assessments conducted for Children Looked After (CLA);
- a CQC action plan and wider improvement plan from the Council had been developed to address areas of weakness identified;
- one area that was required to be addressed included ensuring better control on the health assessment process. Work had been conducted with a range of providers and a clear process for health assessments had been devised. This would involve referrals being sent to the Lead Nurse with Social Care teams from the Council providing all relevant information and proper consent for the assessment;
- the Designated Doctor had conducted a significant amount of work on what information was required during the health assessment process. The revised process had been agreed by NHS Harrow and the Council and as a result further training had been conducted for social workers;
- there was greater emphasis on achieving tangible outcomes when performing health assessments. This required robust health plans being developed and incorporated in care plans;
- it was anticipated that the changes made as a result of the findings from the inspections, would assist towards comprehensive health assessments and in helping children to understand that health assessments were important.

In response to queries raised by Members of the Panel, the representatives from NHS Harrow reported as follows:

- health assessments usually took 1½ hours to conduct. However these assessments could take a longer amount of time depending on the issues involved and who attended;
- the last two cases dealt with by the Designated Doctor had worked well in terms of getting information from the Council. However, in her view, it was taking time to change principles and perceptions from some social workers. NHS Harrow had been firm about obtaining proper consent and the information it required which had caused some initial delay;
- if a child was removed from their family, this created a difficult situation for the relevant child which could impact in health. It was important that social workers had an extensive dialogue with the child's parents and requested information from the GP to ensure the child's health needs are known. This health information should be passed to foster carers and was the same requested by NHS Harrow to ensure comprehensive health assessment;
- a holistic approach was adopted in relation to the health assessment. Educational and emotional issues were addressed, which also highlighted why a significant amount of information was required from the Council;
- consent to conducting Health Assessments was important. Consent meant that the parent and child had a choice on whether to have a health assessment or not. It was important to note that although the need to conduct health assessments had a statutory basis, it did not mean that this was a mandatory requirement. No routine health assessment should ever be conducted against the child's wishes as the main concern was around their emotional well being so the child's co-operation had to be obtained;
- consent was usually sought from the parent of the child as most children were placed voluntarily. Usually consent was also required for all children over 10 years who had capacity to understand the health assessment. If a child was subject to a care order, consent could be given by the relevant social worker;
- there was currently a backlog in the health assessments that were required to be conducted, but NHS Harrow were working closely with the Council to deal with this effectively. Additionally some relevant CLAs' GPs were being asked to conduct health assessments in some cases;
- the changes highlighted to the Panel had commenced a process of change and improvement. The process relating to health assessments had been improved and training for social workers had been conducted. Consultant paediatricians were also in support of the new arrangements. However it was acknowledged that difficulties were still

being encountered particularly in relation to health assessments taking place within 28 days of a referral;

- success for the new process would be measured by a number of factors. These included health plans for Looked After Children being available within 28 days of coming into care, effective quality assurance and holistic health plans and ensuring that health plans were implemented at the first review for any CLA;
- it was important to differentiate between an initial Looked After Children health assessment and a forensic assessment. A forensic assessment would only take place in cases involving suspected abuse i.e. neglect, physical, sexual or emotional abuse. A forensic assessment had an even stricter requirement regarding consent as the purpose was to look for evidence of abuse and any information obtained would be shared with Social Care teams and police;
- it was believed that strategic joint working between NHS Harrow and the Council had improved. There had been constructive discussions between the organisations and it was anticipated that there would be a much more open relationship in the future;
- the Council had updated its case management system which would now generate a range of information for health assessments and would allow health assessments to be monitored effectively.

The Chair requested that a progress report be provided at the next meeting of the Panel.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) a progress report be submitted to the next meeting of the Panel on 18 December 2012.

93. INFORMATION REPORT - Activity and Performance

The Panel received a report which set out the latest performance position and key data relating to Children Looked After (CLA) and Children with Child Protection Plans.

An officer advised that the report highlighted significant improvements that were being achieved. The timeliness of CLA adoptions following an agency decision was improving as was the length of placement under the CLA Placement Strategy.

The officer also highlighted that the Forum previously had concerns regarding the percentage of Care Leavers in suitable accommodation. When the figures were analysed more closely, 12 out of 16 former care leavers were in suitable accommodation. Out of the other 4 care leavers who were not in

accommodation, 3 of these were not in contact with the Council and one was currently in police custody. It was also believed that 2 of the care leavers without accommodation were asylum seekers.

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

- information relating to the number of placement moves of CLA and the length of time relating to placements had been contained in National Indicator 62 and 63;
- in relation to concerns that Harrow had been nearly 50% over the national average in 2010/11 for the number of placement moves for CLA, it was important to note that since then the Council had made great strides. The latest figures for this year had shown this figure drop to 2.0 for quarter 1 and 6.9 for quarter 2. This was well below the national average and in line with the Council's target.

The Chair advised that if there were any further queries on this report, this be raised directly with officers.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

94. Children Looked After Life Chances Forum Action Planning

The Panel received a report which provided information of the progress of the Children Looked After Life Chances Forum action planning, in respect of support for children looked after who leave Local Authority Care.

An officer introduced the report and reported the following:

- the Children Looked After (CLA) Life Chances Forum (The Forum) had been established in 2007. The purpose of the Forum was to improve the life chances and outcomes for CLA and young people leaving care;
- the Forum had evolved over the last 5 years and strategic leadership, governance and performance had all been significantly improved since then;
- membership of the Forum had been developed to ensure targeted attention in the delivery of the Forum's Action Plan. The Forum had also developed specific Terms of Reference;
- membership of the Forum consisted of a Core and an Affiliate membership. The Core membership had been expanded to include representatives from the Youth Offending and Leisure Services;
- the Action Plan developed by the Forum, had been designed to focus on specific activities and actions required to make service improvements for delivery. This would lead to better outcomes for CLA and care leavers;

- the first section of the Forum's Action Plan related to reviewing and providing suitable housing options and standards of accommodation. There had been a significant increase in the demand for single occupancy one bed social housing accommodation and there was a shortage of these properties. Whilst the housing department had increased the quota for care leavers to 25 for 2012, there were still 14 young people who required a review of their accommodation needs;
- the Care Leavers and Housing Sub-Group had reviewed these 14 cases and established that in some cases the young people could remain in their existing accommodation and have short term tenancies identified to meet their needs;
- the Care Leavers and Housing Sub-Group also revised and distributed a protocol for working with care leavers in respect of referrals for housing, support with bidding for tenancies and post support with managing a new tenancy;
- the next section of the Forum's Action Plan, related to engaging with young people and recognising achievements. As part of this, a 'day to day' recognition protocol had been developed which enabled social workers to identify daily achievements from CLA and care leavers;
- an X16 project had been initiated. This was a work experience / apprenticeship programme launched on September 2012, where vulnerable groups of young people had been nominated and placed in a number of work based placements in Harrow Council;
- CLA and care leavers were continued to be provided with support for access to an advocate;
- another section of the Action Plan related to supporting the transition to adulthood. The Council had established a case transfer protocol to support the transition of CLA to the Leaving Care team and service to support independency;
- the Life Skills Programme had been developed and was tailored to meet unique needs and individual circumstances for CLA. The Life Skills Programme had been issued on 1 June 2012 to all CLA between the ages of 14-17 years;
- the next section on the Action Plan related to prioritising health needs. This focused on leisure activities. During this current week, Harrow Leisure Centre were holding a registration session for all CLA;
- promoting a learning culture was another section of the Action Plan. Under this theme, more engagement was required with CLA. A CLA 'Lets Talk' session had taken place in the summer of 2012 which involved the Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Families, the

Corporate Director of Children and Families and other senior managers within the Council;

- Beyond Limits would continue to engage with CLA and care leavers. A report would be provided to the Panel at its meeting on 18 December 2012, on the feedback and evaluation from the Lets Talk session.

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

- an independent housing grant was provided to care leavers when moving into other suitable accommodation. This assisted them with purchasing various necessities required on a day to day basis. This was part of the Leaving Care Charter, which was also required to be reviewed. In addition to this the Life Skills Programme ensured that care leavers were equipped with the right skills and knowledge to be able to adapt once living independently;
- ensuring that mainstream educational provision provided by all schools in the borough addressed the educational needs of CLA was an issue that required partnership working. The CLA Life Chances Forum Membership was made up of a number of different agencies. It was clear that the more stable CLA were, the more they engaged with educational provision;
- the Care Leavers and Housing Sub Group monitored all care leavers and identified their needs. Their needs were then managed to assist their transition stage. Any young child was referred to the Leaving Care team when they were 17½ years old who assisted with providing them with the relevant skills for their progression. The Leaving Care Programme provided young people with the skills required to manage bills and food and budget.

The Chair commented that at the next meeting of the Panel on 18 December 2012, a further report would be provided focusing on apprenticeships. The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regeneration would be invited to this meeting.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the following issues be noted for consideration on future Cabinet or Portfolio Holder Decisions:
 - the Panel support the collective endeavours of Corporate Parents to promote partnership working to improve the outcomes of CLA and care leavers;
 - the Panel support the recognition of the day to day achievements of children looked after and young people leaving care;

- the Panel support the CLA Life Chances Forum with implementing the Forum's Action Plan;
 - the Panel support the consideration to review the Leaving Care Charter as part of the review of Harrow Pledge.
- (2) a report on apprenticeships be presented to the next meeting of the Panel on 18 December 2012.

95. INFORMATION REPORT - Review of CLA Performance at GCSE Level 2011/2012

The Panel received a report which outlined performance of Children Looked After (CLA) in the Summer 2012 GCSE examinations, the factors affecting the performance of individual students and issues for future years.

An officer reported that the information detailed in the report could be interpreted in two ways. Firstly the information could simply be compared to the examination results achieved last year. However this would be a superficial assessment as the number of CLA involved was so small, fluctuations were not significant. The second way to interpret the report was to compare them against the Key Stage 2 results for that relevant child, which was widely considered to be the best indicator of potential, and the length of time that the relevant child had spent in care.

The officer reported the following points:

- 6 out of 19 children assessed at Key Stage 2 at Level 4, who should have collected 5 GCSEs, had not done so. This was disappointing;
- in mitigation, out of these 6 children, 2 had been in care at Key Stage 2. These 2 children had performed better than the remaining 4 children, who had come into care between 2012 and 2011;
- it was also important to highlight that there were CLA who had not achieved Level 4 at Key Stage 2 and yet had made significant achievements at GCSE level. One CLA achieved 6 GCSEs including one at grade C and 2 BTEC qualifications. In this case the relevant foster carer was an excellent advocate for children. This was a strong example of what could be achieved.

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

- the research suggested that definite improvements were identified the longer a child was in care provided they were not experiencing a chaotic situation in their personal circumstances;
- there were issues in that some mainstream schools were inappropriate for some CLA to attend and gain an education from. Schools did have

a responsibility to ensure that all children obtained an education and fulfilled their potential;

- it was believed that all CLA were being challenged enough educationally in Harrow;
- if a CLA was in alternative provision for example a Pupil Referral Unit, they may not be able to sit exams. Similarly if they underwent a move during Years 10 and 11, this could impact on their ability to sit exams.

During the discussion on this item, Members of the Panel made a number of comments as follows:

- all foster parents within the borough were committed to ensuring children within their care went to school and achieved educational qualifications;
- for those CLA who attended school, that school had a duty to ensure the achievement for that child was the maximum it possibly could be. Schools had a responsibility to ensure that all their systems were correct.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

96. Housing for Careleavers

The Panel received a report which provided information regarding housing assistance for care leavers. An officer presented the report and highlighted the following issues:

- the quota for social housing for care leavers was agreed between Housing Services and the Children and Families Directorate in January / February each year;
- in the year 2011/12, the quota agreed was 22 allocations and in the year 2012/13, the quota agreed had increased to 25;
- despite the increased numbers in the quota, it still did not meet the needs of all young people ready to leave care in 2012/13. In order to address future needs there were three possible scenarios that could be adopted;
- the first scenario involved removing the quota altogether and treating care leavers as priority homeless. This would involve care leavers being housed in the private rented sector;
- the second scenario involved continuing with the current quota system. This may not match the demand of young people leaving care and it was important to note that this year there was a 40% reduction in social housing units available for letting. The quota may therefore have to be adjusted in future years;

- the third scenario involved a combination of utilising both social and private rented lettings to meet the demand;
- there were significant financial implications to consider. If a person was declared homeless, the Housing Team would fund the associated costs. For the other options, the Housing Team would seek funds from the Children and Families Directorate to assist with the process.

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

- in dealing with the private rented sector, arrangements would be put in place to ensure that a Service Level Agreement was established and that arrangements were clear between all parties;
- it was important to note that all Members had responsibility as Corporate Parents and in light of this officer recommendation was that the third scenario was the best approach to adopt. The first scenario was not advised;

During the discussion on this item, Members of the Panel made a number of comments as follows:

- if the private rented sector was utilised, it was important to guard against potential negative attitudes from landlords who were not always willing to rent to those receiving benefits;
- if CLA were in employment, then obtaining contributions from them toward their rent may be an option to consider in the future. In addition to this, it had to be considered that any tenants in the private sector were always at risk from being evicted with relatively short notice.

The Chair summarised that it was clear from the discussions that the Panel would support the third scenario suggested on using a combination of social and private rented lettings to meet demand for care leavers requiring accommodation. However it was also evident that further exploration on the options was required, especially in relation to the relevant financial implications. The Panel requested that officer perform further work on this and provide a report back to the Panel on 22 April 2013.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) a further report on this subject be provided at the Panel meeting scheduled for 22 April 2013.

97. Update on Improvement - Ofsted

The Panel considered a presentation of the Corporate Director of Children and Families which detailed the planned actions to improve services to children in Harrow following the recent Safeguarding and Looked After Children Inspection.

An officer reported that Harrow had received a Safeguarding and Looked After Children inspection in May 2012, which found that these relevant arrangements were rated as adequate overall. Recommendations had been made which were required to be addressed immediately and those which had to be addressed in the medium to long term.

An improvement board had been established which included a range of Members including a range of the Council's partners and the Council's senior officers.

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

- the outcomes detailed in the Improvement Development Plan (The Plan) were the measures for success. The biggest challenge facing the Plan was the timescales associated with the improvements required. Some of the timescales were difficult to achieve in order to ensure maximum impact;
- a shorter summary of the Plan could be prepared for submission to the next Panel meeting, to provide a clear indication on what its success criteria involved;
- it was agreed that young people should wherever possible be allocated a social worker whom they knew and wished to work with;
- the inspection conducted had taken place when the new operating model in Children's Services had been in operation for only 4 months.

During the discussion on this item, Members made a number of comments as follows:

- the Plan should provide more emphasis on what the success measures were. This was not clear and this was important to allow the Panel to be able to appropriately review the Plan;
- trust between young people and their relevant social workers was a key part of the Plan.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the presentation be noted;

- (2) a summary report highlighting the measures for success of the Improvement Development Plan be presented to the next meeting of the Panel on 18 December 2012.

98. Agenda Tracker

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

- an item on apprenticeships for CLA, an update from NHS Harrow on the progress of health assessments and a report on summarising the outcomes for success on the Improvement Development Plan would be presented to the meeting scheduled for 18 December 2012;
- a report on reviewing the Leaving Care Charter as part of the review of Harrow Pledge and on further information relating to housing for care leavers be presented to the meeting scheduled for 22 April 2013.

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

99. Chair's Announcements

The Chair announced that on 1 November 2012, there would be a Celebration of Achievement event held at the Premier House Banqueting Suite. All Panel Members were encouraged to attend.

The Chair also announced that there would she would be asking the Panel at the meeting on 22 April 2012 whether they should continue to meet regularly at 7.30 pm or revert back to the previous start times of 6.00 pm.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.14 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR MITZI GREEN
Chairman

Officer Attendance:

Kamini Rambellas – Interim Divisional Director Targeted Services
Catherine Halsall – Virtual Headteacher
Nick Crick – Service Manager Children Looked After Service
Adeline Abraham – Children in Care Participation Officer
Sue Dixon – Designated Nurse for Looked After Children
Dr Ximena Poblete – Designated Doctor for Looked After Children
Jon Dalton – Service Manager Housing Needs