

Corporate Parenting Panel

Minutes

5 October 2021

Present:

Chair: Angella Murphy-Strachan

Councillors: Maxine Henson
Janet Mote
Kiran Ramchandani
Christine Robson
Lynda Seymour

**Non-voting
Advisory
Member:** Valerie Griffin
Foster Carer

**Councillors (in
attendance):** Councillor Dr Lesline
Lewinson

**Officers (in
attendance):** Paul Hewitt
Jacinta Kane
Peter Tolley
Christine Nichols
Alison Braithwaite
Anupameya Jain
Kat Robinson
Dipika Patel
Joy Bell
Corporate Director People
Head of Corporate Parenting
Director Children Social
Care
Named Nurse in Harrow
Central and North West
London NHS Foundation
Trust
Assistant Head Teacher –
Harrow Virtual School
Assistant Head Teacher
(Post 16) – Harrow Virtual
School
Business Intelligence
Partner
Social Worker

117. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note that there were no Reserve Members at the meeting.

118. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the Declarations of Interests published in advance of the meeting on the Council's website were taken as read.

119. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2021 be taken as a read and signed correct record.

120. Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were received.

121. Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received.

122. Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received.

Resolved Items

123. Update from Care Leavers about their Experiences

Members received an update from two care experienced young people on their experiences over the past 18 months. They informed the Panel on how they had coped during the lockdown arising from restrictions due to the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. They shared their experiences of being supported by Harrow.

They were accompanied to the meeting by their Social Worker, Joy Bell.

Young person, "S", who was 18 years old, spoke about her experiences moving into privately rented accommodation with her older sister. She shared that funding arrangements were authorised swiftly, which reduced her anxieties about moving out of foster care. S acknowledged that the move was challenging and exacerbated by testing positive for Covid-19, just as she was moving. However, she noted that there was nothing that Harrow could have done more to support with her move. S also spoke about her university studies and her early experiences of this.

Members inquired how much support she had received from Children's Services during this time and if there were any gaps during this period.

S shared her experiences of being in care as a child and noted that the support of a Social Worker had become increasingly significant throughout adolescence and above 18 years old. S reflected that her previous Social

Worker was burdened by too many cases and was unable to respond to her in a timely fashion, leading to gaps in support. S shared that her current Social Worker (Joy Bell) made her feel like the only person on her case load and shared how important it was to her that her Social Worker responded quickly and had a good relationship with her.

S was praised by the Panel for her confidence and exceptional achievements.

Young person "A", who was 15 years old and in care spoke about her experiences of learning online during the lockdown. She acknowledged that this had caused a significant dip in her motivation. She noted that her attainment dropped significantly during this period. She confirmed that she had requested Mathematics, English and Science tuition from Virtual School to supplement this.

It was further advised by the Assistant Headteacher of the Harrow Virtual School that a GCSE tutor for Mathematics had just been sourced earlier in the week. Moreover, two GCSE tutors for English and Science were in the process of being obtained to work with A.

A was asked by the panel about her experiences obtaining a laptop from the Council and confirmed that it had been a speedy process. A shared that it was difficult to adjust to Microsoft Teams and online learning platforms, but she now felt confident with this.

A also shared that she felt that it was important for Social Workers to be on an even level with their young people, being sociable outside of statutory settings and making time for them. A stated that her Social Worker, Joy Bell, supported her well and made time for her.

A was praised by the panel for her resilience during lockdown.

Members expressed their appreciation to the young people for sharing their experiences and wished them well in their future endeavours. They encouraged the young people to feedback their experiences, including the negative ones, so that it would lead to improvement.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

124. Update and Performance for Corporate Parenting Service

Members received the Corporate Parenting Service Update.

They were informed that there was an overall improvement (of 11%) in the children classified as not in education, employment or training (NEET) performance in the first quarter. However, improving the numbers of care leavers in education, training and employment remained a priority for the Service.

Prospects were commissioned to support care leavers (16-19-year olds) back into education, employment and training (EET) and Xcite (for the over 18-year-olds). Additional support from Catch 22 "Future Pathways" to support

young people into training and employment up to age of 24, was being provided through partnerships with employers, such as Wagamamas.

The data on children placed over 20 miles from Harrow was examined and explained. There were 30 individual children placed over 20 miles from Harrow (at 30 June 2021). Most of these children were placed outside of Harrow due to care planning decisions, based on an assessment of their welfare and best interests.

Seven children were placed outside of Harrow due to child sexual exploitation (CSE) or child criminal exploitation; four children were placed with family, kinship carers or adopters, and 10 children had been matched long term with their foster carers and were in their permanent home. Eight children were placed in a specialist residential placement to meet their educational or disability needs, and one child had experienced a placement breakdown and was in a temporary placement.

Harrow Council was one of the first local authorities in England to sign the Charter for Parents in and leaving care. The Council was committed to supporting mothers and fathers who were in care, or in the process of leaving care.

The Fostering Service Annual Report highlights were shared with Panel Members.

There were key challenges in recruiting more foster carers during the past year, and the following were reasons:

- 1) during lockdown, the usual methods of recruitment marketing were put on hold. The Harrow People Magazine was not published and no face to face events or information evenings could be held;
- 2) to continue raising awareness of the need for new Foster Carers in Harrow during the pandemic, leaflets were distributed to households in the borough. A Virtual Information Session was held and fostering promoted via Harrow Website and Facebook Page; and
- 3) the Service would be resuming the usual methods of active recruitment now that the Covid-19 restrictions had been lifted. The Service would go into the community, hold events and target communities to raise the profile of fostering, particularly in the Eastern European community.

In terms of Private Fostering, 10 new private fostering notifications were made to Harrow (April 2020 - March 2021). Following assessment, six of the notifications were assessed as not private fostering. Therefore, only four new private fostering arrangements started during the year. At the end of March 2021 there were six active private fostering arrangements.

Placement sufficiency was a key issue for Harrow and for councils across England. Work was continuing on the West London Fostering Project with Ealing, Brent and Harrow. This was to develop a shared offer to foster carers

and improvement in the recruitment, retention and support for Local Authority Foster Carers.

Furthermore, with the anticipated increase in unaccompanied minors (UASC) seeking asylum in the country, it was noted that Harrow Council would continue to do their part and accommodate UASCs.

Harrow had committed to receiving 0.08% of the child population. In real terms, this meant that Harrow was likely to accommodate a further 20 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the months ahead. Therefore, the numbers of CLA would likely increase.

There would be a need to recruit additional social workers to manage the increase in children becoming looked after. More carers in the borough, would be required to cope with increased demand in fostering. Harrow had partnered with neighbouring Ealing and Brent to keep Children Looked After (CLA) in North West London.

It was envisaged that one young asylum seeker would be invited to join the next meeting to share their experiences of being looked after by Harrow Council.

It was noted that the Corporate Parenting Strategy was currently being updated for 2022-2025. This would be shared at the next Panel meeting.

An update about the National Care Review – Case for Change was also provided at the meeting, and the link shared for the paper: “*case-for-change.pdf*” (Independent-Review.UK)

Members thanked the Children Services Team for their work and noted the progress that had been made since the last meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Update be noted.

125. Virtual School Performance Update

Members received an update on the performance of the Harrow Virtual School.

The Personal Education Plans (PEP) returns remained at 100%, with 111 pupils of Statutory School Age (SSA) on roll. This was a slight drop in cohort numbers by 3 students since last year: 70% of students had been in care for 1 year or longer; 50% were educated outside of Harrow; 95% attended schools which were Ofsted rated as ‘Good’ or better; and 23% had an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP).

Regarding school attendance, 80% (84/105) of pupils had an ‘X’ mark (the mark given when children cannot attend school due to a Covid-19 related matter). The ‘X’ mark was an authorised absence. Furthermore, 78% attended school, 8% had had suspension. However, no child had been permanently excluded.

The following attainment results were noted: Reception - 60% (3/5) achieved 'good level of development' in Early Years' Assessments, with the England average being 48%; Key Stage 1 - 67% (2/3) achieved 'expected standards' in Writing, Reading and Maths. The England average: 52%-Reading, 49% Maths and 42% for Writing; Key Stage 2 - 67% (2/3) achieved 'greater depth' in Reading, with the England average being 12%, and 67% (2/3) had achieved 'expected standards' in Writing, with the England average being 50%; and 33% (1/3) of pupils achieved 'expected standards' in Maths, where the England average was 51%.

Three students had undertaken A levels courses (or equivalent). Two of them obtained 3 A level passes; and the other achieved a Level 3 BTEC. Their destinations were: student 1 - Criminology degree course at Greenwich University; student 2: Level 4 Art Course at West Herts College; and student 3 would be taking a gap year to work and get experience before heading to university next academic year to study paediatric nursing.

The following were highlighted as priorities for the coming year:

- 1) catch-up interventions to support children who had fallen behind with their learning;
- 2) increase the number of children with good school attendance from 90% to 95% or higher;
- 3) increase the Attainment 8 Score (18) to be in line with or above the England Average (21);
- 4) review education packages for 'hard to reach' Key Stage 3 and Key 4 students; and
- 5) Black and Asian boys had been identified as a vulnerable group, who represented 57% of the cohort with a suspension. Further interventions would be explored for all pupils at risk of receiving a suspension.

Members queried what interventions were in place to assist young students who were prone to get into challenges at school. Was there any unconscious bias in some of the decisions to suspend or exclude students from certain ethnic backgrounds?

It was advised that there was support from teachers and Social Workers to assist students to remain focused on their studies, and some were encouraged to seek "time out" from stressful situations. Furthermore, there had not been any reports of "unconscious bias" or racism being behind reasons to suspend or exclude students.

Members expressed their appreciation to the leadership of the Harrow Virtual School for their hard work over the years, and welcomed the improvements made.

RESOLVED: That the Update be noted.

126. Update and Performance on Health for Children Looked After

Members received the Harrow Children Looked After (CLA) Health Report.

The report set out the delivery of health services to Harrow's Children Looked After (CLA) during April - June 2021 in line with the national guidance. The report reviewed the service and included clinical work undertaken during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

Initial health assessments were being triaged in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Assessments were completed either face to face, virtually or by telephone, on a case by case basis. Review health assessment were offered face to face appointments. However, if declined they were completed either by telephone or virtually.

The CLA team also assisted the London Borough of Harrow to: record and report dates of dental checks following health assessment; update immunisation status of each CLA following health assessment where possible; GP registration; and record and report dates of optician checks.

New processes had been initiated with initial health assessments for infants under 1 month old being carried out virtually and would include data from other health record sources. A further face to face health review was to be offered at 3 months of age rather than at 6 months of age.

Members queried on what mental health services were available to CLA, and how accessible such services were.

It was advised that mental health services were available and could be accessed by CLA if needed.

Members expressed their appreciation to service providers for their work with the children and young people.

RESOLVED: That the Report be noted.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 6.00 pm, closed at 7.53 pm).

(Signed) Councillor Angella Murphy-Strachan
Chair