

Ordinary Member

Reserve Member

Councillor Chetna Halai

Councillor Vipin Mithani

59. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

- Councillor Simon Brown declared a non-pecuniary interest in that his daughter had started working for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CNWL). He remained in the meeting while the items were being discussed.

60. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2023 be taken as a read and signed correct record.

61. Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were received.

62. Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received.

63. Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that deputations were received.

Resolved Items

64. Update from Participation Service and update from care experienced young people about their experiences

The Panel heard a presentation from the Participation Officer who confirmed that children aged 4-17 had the opportunity to provide independent yearly feedback. The responses included many positive comments regarding the social workers, as well as areas for improvement.

Key themes:

- all young people could identify a safe, trusted adult with whom they discussed their worries.
- many young people expressed difficulties around timely communication with their social worker
- most young people felt uncertainty around the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer
- all but one young people were satisfied with their placement – the dissatisfied young person was moved to alternative accommodation within two weeks.

The presentation also highlighted that:

- To date, 50 Young People received free gym memberships.
- Integrated training from care-experienced young adults into the Social Work Academy – delivering sessions for international Social Workers and Newly Qualified Social Workers.
- Hosted events and activities for children looked after – where 34 young people attended at least one outing, which included day out to Kidzania, Thorpe Park and Go Ape.
- In September 2023, two care-experienced young adults generously delivered training to the Social Work Academy.
- briefed the Lead Member on the case for making care experience a protected characteristic

The Panel welcomed two care experienced young persons, who shared their experiences of being looked-after by Harrow Council and received leaving care services.

Mahnoor shared that she felt she had to work twice as hard as the other kids in her calls. She recalled that other children were driven to university interviews by their parents, but her foster carer didn't do this for her. She had planned to stay with her foster carer under staying put after she finished school, but her foster carer changes her mind. This felt like a betrayal and she wished that someone had advocated for her and supported her better. Mahnoor shared that her After Care Personal Advisor was really good, and this support and her friendship group was central to her succeeding at her university course. Mahnoor added that "transitions are so important"

She was pleased to note that social workers planned activities and day outs with children and believed that this will have a very positive effect on the children.

On the other hand the second young person had a different experience, she had recently graduated from University with a degree in Architecture. She had lots of support from her foster parents and social workers. She shared that the "foster carer always advocated for us, and her foster carer created a family that's not biological. She also noted that her After Care Personal Advisor has been great professionally and emotionally. In the past, a previous worker said they would "speak to management" and nothing would be done. She mentioned that she had moved out of the foster family home, however, kept contact with her foster family and lived very close to them.

The Panel and officers recognised the importance of early interventions of social workers, schools and thanked the young persons for sharing their experiences and the very helpful feedback.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

65. Update and Performance for Corporate Parenting Service

The Panel received a presentation from the Assistant Director of Corporate Parenting which covered a number of areas such as performance scorecard, Policy and Practice updates, Pilots and Innovation and Commissioning updates.

With regard to the performance indicators, Assistant Director of Corporate Parenting stated that Harrow had performed well and on target in all indicators, apart from two indicators – dental checks and missing children. One indicator was Children Looked After with up to date dental records at 82%, it was highlighted this is better than statistical neighbour and national averages. 82% of all CLA have up to date dental checks (92/112 children). This is better than the statistical neighbour average of 75% and England average of 70%. The service is reviewing this monthly with a goal of 90% of children having a dental check within 12 months.

The other indicator was Children Looked After with at least 1 missing episode at 7.5%, accounting for 16 children having gone missing in the first quarter of 2023-2024.

Members questioned how the risk to missing children is being managed. Members asked to be briefed on the timescales/length of missing episodes, severity of cases and significant risk to children, whether children are missing regularly or go missing once, and what the take up of return home interviews is. It was explained that this is a cumulative indicator and the risk to children is monitored weekly in the missing children meeting held with the missing persons police. Missing children will have a strategy meeting with social worker, police, schools and placements, and other connected professionals in order to find them quickly and assess the risk. Children who are assessed to be at risk of exploitation are reviewed at the monthly MACE (Multiagency Child Exploitation Panel) and are referred for a child trafficking guardian and a national referral mechanism (NRM) referral made if there are concerns about child trafficking. Lauren Stephenson, the Adolescent Safety Development Team Manager will provide a detailed update about missing children at the next panel.

Arising from discussion on the percentage of Children Looked After placed more than 20 miles away from home, it was noted that work was underway in the Children & Young Adults with Disabilities Service (CYADS) and commissioning to improve placement sufficiency for children with disabilities requiring residential care so that children could be placed closer to or within Harrow. It was noted that this will be discussed in detail at the next Panel meeting, with the AD for Corporate Parenting providing a breakdown of long term vs short term placements 20+ miles away.

Members were advised that Care Experience as a Protected Characteristic has been introduced by 55 Councils to date, this will be brought to Cabinet for December 2023. Members were informed that Harrow and Coram Ambitious for Adoption had been awarded the Early Permanence Quality Mark, which was awarded to adoption agencies that demonstrated the quality of their service, and their commitment to delivering early permanence for children

where adoption is in their best interest. It was noted that three permanent places were already filled.

Harrow has partnered with Centrepoin to provide intensive, relationship-based support for 5 Harrow care leavers with complex needs and high risk of homelessness. Projected to result in c.£156-£208k savings per year.

Harrow has also partnered with local authorities across West London (WLA) as part for the Fostering Recruitment and Retention Hub (DfE Funded). This partnership with WLA boroughs will improve recruitment and retention on “in-house” foster carers and to compete effectively with IFAs. We are 1 of 10 clusters running this programme across the country.

Finally, members were advised that Advocacy and Independent Visitor Services contract has been awarded to Coram Voice following a competitive tendering process, and including a care experienced young person on the moderation panel. Coram Voice are a sector leader for Advocacy and Independent Visiting (IV) services and are also commissioned by the DfE to deliver the National Advocacy Advice Line and Safety Net service.

The advocacy service is for all children and young people including children at risk of homelessness, in care - including children living away from home, separated minors, care leavers, disabled children receiving short breaks and all children and young people accessing children’s social care service between the ages of 4-25 years. They will be invited to present an annual report to this Panel.

The Panel thanked the officer for the detailed report and noted the positive outcomes.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

66. Virtual School Performance Update

The Panel received a presentation on the performance of the Harrow Virtual School from the Headteacher for Children Looked After (CLA).

The Virtual Headteacher drew particular attention to:

- Harrow Virtual School tracked and monitored the attendance of CLA on a daily basis. The Attendance Officer received and responded this information and any anomalies in attendance, and is communicated to social workers, carers and other key professionals in good time.
- Pupils who were emotionally- based school avoiders are also supported by professionals in the Virtual School to include learning mentors, educational and clinical psychologists. Key assessments are conducted in a timely manner and a planned programme of support can be put in place early.
- Overall attendance had increased slightly from 80% -82%.

- 52% (23/44) of pupils with attendance below 90% has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or are in receipt of SEN support.
- The ratio of boys to girls with PA is approximately 1:1
- The number of pupils with at least 1 suspension has reduced from 11% (2021-2022) to 8% (2022-2023). Harrow's figures were below the England average which was 10%.
- The national average for Persistent Absence (PA) was 19.1% for children in care for 1 year plus. It was noted that one of the major factors was mental health issues and also parent lost confidence sending children to school. The ambition was to reduce this to 10% or less.

The Panel acknowledged the positive aspects of the report.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

67. Update and Performance on Health for Children Looked After

The Named Nurse for Children Looked After in Harrow, introduced the report which outlined the key performance indicators for Harrow CLA Initial Health Assessments (IHA) and improvement plans.

It was noted that the CLA Team:

- Record and report dates of dental checks following health assessment
- Update immunisation status of each CLA following health assessment where possible
- Record and report dates of Optician Checks
- 47% of Initial Health Assessment's (IHA) were received outside of timescales. 7 of the 19 late requests were completed within timescales.
- 2 young people refused health assessments.

It was confirmed that a text messaging function has been set up to replace the telephone call reminder to carers and young people. It will be ready to use after confirmation once operational.

The Panel heard a positive case study where a Young Person who had experienced trauma and abuse received a major improvement following an officer review. The CLA nurse had liaised with the young person's social worker which helped to continue to correctly support the young person. This resulted in the Young Person receiving the correct help and guidance to encourage medical treatment.

The Panel thanked the Named Nurse for their comprehensive presentation.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 6.10 pm, closed at 8.10 pm).

(Signed) Councillor Hitesh Karia
Chair