

Corporate Parenting Panel

Minutes

1 February 2024

Present:

Chair: Councillor Hitesh Karia

Councillors: Simon Brown Chetna Halai
Matthew Goodwin-Freeman Sasi Suresh

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

**Officers (in
attendance):** Joy Bell Participation Officer
Director of Children Services
Parmjit Chahal Assistant Director –
Corporate Parenting
Jacinta Kane Team Manager Adolescent
Safety Development
Donna Kitchen Head of Harrow Children’s
Services, CNWL
Maria Luscombe Head Teacher, Virtual
School
Mellina Williamson-Taylor Assistant Head Teacher
Virtual School
Natasha Taylor

**Apologies
received:** Councillor Aneka Shah-Levy

68. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Reserve Member

Councillor Aneka Shah-Levy

Councillor Sasikala Suresh

69. Declarations of Interest

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

70. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2023 be taken as a read and signed correct record.

71. Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were received.

72. Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received.

73. Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received.

74. Update from Participation Service and Care Experienced Young People

The Panel heard a presentation from the Participation Officer outlining the key messages from the 2023 Care Leaver Survey. Key themes from the survey included:

- almost all young people felt worried about the increasing cost of living – particularly the price of groceries and the affordability of bills
- most care leavers reported feeling lonely ‘within a typical week’
- several young people requested support to purchase warm clothing and a winter coat
- most young people felt uncertainty around the availability of housing
- most young people shared that their Personal Advisor could easily be contacted.

In response to hearing the voice of care leavers, the following actions were taken:

- all care leavers had recently received a £100 supermarket voucher, as part of the Household Support Fund
- to date, initiatives to address loneliness have included our Care-Experienced Christmas Dinner, the Care Leavers Forum, events and outings, and the availability of Independent Visitors
- all young people who requested support with winter clothing were given a discretionary clothing allowance

- although 20 flats are made available to care leavers each year, demand continues to outstrip supply across London, and care leavers were also supported with private rent and deposit
- young people were regularly signposted to Coram Voice for support around advocacy

The presentation also highlighted that in the past year:

- 62 young people received free gym memberships, this included those out of borough.
- Two training sessions, run by care-experienced individuals, were delivered to international Social Workers and Newly Qualified Social Workers to improve direct practice with children.
- The participation service hosted 14 events and activities for children looked after – with 40 young people attended at least one outing.
- 691 Christmas presents were given out to children known to the London Borough of Harrow, this included care-experienced children and care leavers.

It was noted that December 2023 was the highest number of brand new toys, books, toiletries and gifts given to children through the Christmas campaign.

The officer highlighted that 2023 had been a very successful year of activities and participation for children and young people.

On 15th February, the Care-Experienced Award Ceremony will be celebrated, and panel members are welcomed to join this event.

In response to members' questions the officer confirmed the value of support received from volunteers, and of course additional funding for activities for children and young people were always welcomed. The Officer was encouraged to continue exploring local businesses for promotion and discounts.

The Panel thanked the Officer for the presentation.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

75. 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, Children Looked After (CLA) reviews, dental and health, 20+ miles away, Missing children and Placement Sufficiency

With regard to the performance indicators, Assistant Director of Corporate Parenting stated that Harrow continued to perform well in comparison to statistical neighbours and national averages. Harrow performed better than

other local authorities in relation to placement stability indicators, suitable accommodation for care leavers and care leavers in education, employment and training (EET).

In quarter 2, 90% of all CLA had reviews in timescale, while this is not a published Key Performance Indicator, the target was to have at least 95% of all reviews within timescale.

Members were informed that usual review timescales were; within 1 month of when child first entered care, a second review within 3 months, and within 6 months thereafter. CLA reviews were chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO); Service sat within Quality Assurance and Service Improvement with its core functions consisted of reviewing plans for children in care and monitoring the Local Authority in respect of its corporate parenting and safeguarding responsibilities. A total of 18 reviews were late in Q2, however, the majority of reviews were held within 2 weeks of being due.

In terms of dental checks and health checks performance for quarter 2: 83.3% of all CLA have up to date dental checks (90/108 children). This was better than the statistical neighbour average of 75% and England average of 70%. The service's primary challenge was around teenagers refusing to see a dentist, and work being carried out by social workers encouraged attendance. A further 5 children were open to CYADS team and had specialist dentists to hat met their needs. Harrow's target was for at least 90% of all CLA to have an up to date dental check. The CLA health team provided a separate and detailed report at the panel re: Health Checks, challenges and progress made. The team worked creatively with nurse colleagues to explain the purpose of the medical and to provided reassurance to young people who had been uncertain and unwilling to meet with nursing staff. Currently 10 children had not had a medical within the last 12 months.

In relation to Children placed more than 20 miles away from home, it was noted that 85% were long term placements and only 15% were short term placements. There was a decrease in the number of children placed 20 miles of more from Harrow.

The officer gave an update on missing episodes, with 8.6% of children looked after during Q2 (16/244 children) having had a missing incident. Any missing incident indicated a child was at risk of harm, each missing child was reviewed weekly with police and senior social care managers, as well as independent return home interviews were offered. Strategy meetings with the police and multiagency network were held to find children and prevent further missing incidents, identified and addressed safeguarding risks, included proactive measures such as Child Abduction Warning Notices, phone tracking, and national alerts Children who might be at risk of harm while missing from care were also subject to MACE panel (multiagency child exploitation panel) arrangements.

An update about placement sufficiency challenges, the placement sufficiency strategy and work undertaken to development placement sufficiency for children were also given and outlined in the slides for the meeting.

In response to members' questions regarding the target of dental checks, the Officer confirmed that a 90% target was set at a high standard, to make sure we were aspirational for children.

In response to members' questions regarding placement sufficiency, the officer explained that sibling groups, and parent and child placements could be most difficultly sourced. However, there were a number of foster carers caring for sibling groups and provided care to parents and children in-house.

The Panel thanked the officer for the detailed report.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

76. Missing Children Report

The Panel welcomed a new report presented by The Adolescent Safety Development Team Manager which captured missing children activity for the period of 1 April 2023 to 31 December 2023.

Members were informed that a new system was introduced which made it easier to report a missing child and it was clearer. Return Home interviews were conducted which indicated that the top 5 risk factors were concerns with family / friends contact, drugs, criminality, alcohol misuse and child sexual exploitation.

The data highlighted that the number of repeat missing episodes for CLA significantly increased and the 10 most frequently missing children accounted for more than three quarters (77%) of all missing episodes reported.

Members noted that there were a rise in missing children reported in 2023 and the common age were 16-17 years old.

Discussion centered around prevention of missing episodes and it was confirmed that there were 2 missing children co-ordinators who liaised with the social worker, the missing child and other professionals involved, reviewed such cases and worked together to prevent such episodes.

Members appreciated the report, and asked that an annual report is presented to the panel which included the impact of actions undertaken by staff to reduce missing episodes (including successes), breakdown of the cohort of children who were persistently missing, a risk rating for missing children.

The Chair thanked the Officer for a detailed report and welcomed such reports in the future.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

77. Virtual School Performance Update

The Panel received a presentation on the performance of the Harrow Virtual School from the Headteacher for CLA.

The Virtual Headteacher drew particular attention to:

- 70% (54/79) pupils have attendance which is 90% or better. 19% (15/79) have 100% attendance.
- 30% are persistently absent, 65% (16/25) of which are male.
- 5% (4/79) of pupils have had a Suspension. All pupils are secondary school aged, with 75% of these students in Key Stage 4. One pupil with a Suspension has an EHCP.
- No child has had a permanent exclusion.

It was noted that Performance at Key Stage 4 had improved. More students (77%) received GCSES passes (Grades 1-9) when compared to the last academic year (70%). The number of students achieving a good GCSE pass in both English and Maths had also increased by 6%. 31% (2023) compared to 25% (2022).

Members were informed that 7 students in Year 12 were currently not in education, employment or training (NEET). However, there were bespoke programmed support in place for them.

The presentation also highlighted that

- In 2022-2023 5 students were enrolled on A level or level 3 courses. Three of these students were on extended courses and would complete their studies in July 2025.
- University students continued to receive support for the Virtual School e.g. equipment for specialist studies or laptops.

The Panel thanked the Officer for the comprehensive report.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

78. Update and Performance on Health for Children Looked After

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

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
- 13 of the 23 late requests were seen in timescales.

- The main factor contributing to completing RHA's outside of timescale are late requests.
- 15 of 59 requests for RHA were received outside timescales. 11 out of the 15 late requests were completed in timescales.

It was confirmed that fortnightly meetings with LA colleagues were in place to improve late requests and young people were sent reminder text message with appointment confirmation.

The Panel noted that Named Nurse attended the Foster Carers Forum in November 2023 and also delivered training to Social Work Academy as well as training update to Designated Teachers. In December 2023 the Specialist Nurse for Harrow CLA delivered training update to Harrow Community Paediatricians.

The Panel heard a positive case study where a Young Person who had a difficult childhood, experienced significant trauma, lost mother due to ill health at young age. Concerns included going missing, suspected drug use as well as self-harming and suicidal ideations. The CLA nurse had liaised with Support Keyworker at MACE where the Young person was referred to relevant services which met her health needs. CLA Nurse continued to support young person and gave contact details for further support regarding health.

The Panel thanked the Named Nurse for their report and acknowledged the positive case study.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

79. Any Other Urgent Business

RESOLVED: To note that there was no other urgent business.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 6.00 pm, closed at 8.10 pm).

(Signed) Councillor Hitesh Karia
Chair