

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES

22 APRIL 2013

Chairman: * Councillor Mitzi Green

Councillors: * Christine Bednell * Varsha Parmar
* Margaret Davine * Lynda Seymour
* Chris Mote (1)

In attendance: Bill Phillips Minute 117-124
(Councillors)

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

113. Welcome

The Chair welcomed Ugo Egenti, Yuel Solomon and Sommaiye Haeshmi, 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.

114. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Reserve Member

Councillor Janet Mote

Councillor Chris Mote

115. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the following interest was declared:

Agenda Item 7 – Health Report on Looked After Children for the Corporate Parenting Panel

Councillor Chris Mote declared a non-pecuniary interest in that his daughter was a senior staff nurse employed by the NHS. He would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

116. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 December 2012, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

117. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions, petitions or deputations were received at this meeting.

RESOLVED ITEMS

118. Health Report on Looked After Children for the Corporate Parenting Panel

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 in relation to the health of looked after children (CLA) and young people in Harrow.

The Panel were advised that:

- a significant amount of improvement had been made since the last Panel meeting relating to children in care. A process for health assessments was in place and targets relating to timescales for initial health assessments were beginning to be met and this was a huge achievement;
- GPs offer continuity of care and could develop increasing expertise to deal with physical and emotional health issues with CLA;
- there was now a better quality of health assessments for CLA. This provided a deeper recognition of health needs and comprehensive recommendations from health plans to be included in care plans for CLA. Health plans require close working together between the social worker, LAC Nurse and lead health professional.

The representatives from the NHS responded to queries from Members of the Panel as follows:

- Immunisations of CLA: it was often not clear at CLA's initial health assessment whether these were up to date. Obtaining immunisation records formed part of their health plan. In addition to this the School Nurse Service would be looking at immunisation of all children as part of their priorities;
- where a health assessment was conducted for CLA and young people who had been placed outside of the borough, if close to Harrow it was possible for the health assessment to take place in Harrow but if too far the assessment would take place in another borough. Insofar as it was possible, it was aimed that placements would always occur in Harrow rather than another borough;
- the Looked After Children (LAC) Lead Nurse did a good job with those CLA who were more difficult to engage with and was able to carry out the health assessments and develop good relationships. This was part of the LAC Lead Nurse's role and she was able to make CLA feel more relaxed and comfortable. If the CLA still did not wish to engage, the LAC Lead Nurse would liaise with the CLA's GP to discuss any health concerns and ways to address these. The LAC Lead Nurse would also send a health package to those relevant CLA;
- a new GP service designed for CLA who were Asylum Seekers had been established. This was an excellent initiative which would develop good practice and expertise in relation to dealing with CLA.

During the discussion on this item officers from Harrow Council commented that it would be helpful if they had the content of CLA health plan when the health assessment had been conducted. The Designated Health professionals noted that social workers must have access to the health plans and said that this issue had not been brought to their attention. The Chairman asked the officers and the representatives from the NHS to liaise further on this issue to find a solution.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

119. Housing for Careleavers

The Panel received a report which updated it on housing assistance available to careleavers.

An officer addressed the Panel and reported that in the year 2012/13, the quota of permanent housing supplied for independent living for careleavers had been 25. This had proved to be a good estimate for the number of careleavers requiring housing.

However for the year 2013/14 it was expected that the quota allocated would reduce. This was a result of changes being introduced as a result of changes made to Welfare Reform and the increased pressure on the Council's finances.

Only 20 housing units were currently available for careleavers, which could mean that approximately 2 or 3 careleavers may not receive housing support. If the quota was not sufficient alternatives could be considered such as housing in the private rented sector.

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

- there was a great deal of pressure on housing requirements in the borough;
- careleavers were treated as a priority by the Council together with other priority classes.

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

- There were concerns that the allocated quota of housing for careleavers would portray a negative perception of the Council. The private sector was insecure and there was a risk that careleavers could be made homeless;
- The Council had to be aware of its responsibilities as Corporate Parents. Careleavers had to be provided with all necessary support to lead them into an independent life. This had to be an absolute priority;
- If careleavers were not supported, it would cost more financially to assist them later on in their lives.

During the discussion on this item, the representatives from Beyond Limits commented that careleavers often valued living with other careleavers and that sharing accommodation was an option that could be investigated. This provided an important support network.

The Chair commented that this was an excellent suggestion and requested that officers investigate this possibility and report back to the Panel at its meeting currently scheduled for 21 October 2013.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

120. 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 (CPP).

An officer introduced the reports and highlighted the key points as follows:

- monthly performance on initial assessments had improved significantly. A new management team was in place which had led to this

improvement being achieved. However given the low performance of the previous quarters this performance figure was still relatively low and the target for the end of quarter 4 would not be met. Harrow had adopted a single assessment in line with the Working Together guidance but would continue to monitor timescales;

- long term stability of placements measured the percentage of CLA who had been looked after for more than two and a half years and who had been in the same placement for the last two years. This figure had dropped to 55%. This indicator involved small numbers and at the end of quarter 3, 11 of 20 relevant CLA had long term placement stability. The reason for the drop was because some children in stable placements had turned 16 and left the cohort. In addition to this 6 children, including a sibling group, had become looked after for more than two and a half years;
- the Council had significantly reduced the number of CPP which had been in place for over 2 years to a level which was better than average. It was still important to note that there would be the odd case where having a longer period for a CPP would be appropriate;
- at the end of quarter 3, 12 out of 19 former careleavers were known to be in suitable accommodation. 5 were not in contact with the service and one was in custody. 9 out of the 19 were in education, employment or training;
- performance in relation to exclusions and absences of CLA had improved than the previous academic year;
- the number of CLA placed in foster homes had increased further and the Council were moving in the right direction;
- overall there had been significant challenges in the last year and a lot of work was still required.

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

- where a teenager became a CLA this did have an effect on their educational and employment outcomes. Within this age they were more likely to suffer from behavioural issues and require catching up on the national curriculum. Despite this all authorities faced similar issues and the Council still had work to do to improve in this area. Officers would prepare a report to the meeting of the Panel currently scheduled for 21 October 2013 detailing the current issues and proposals for improvement;
- there could be a variety of reasons why former careleavers were no longer in employment, education or training;

- at the time of writing the report, the number of CLA in secure accommodation was one;

At the conclusion of the item officers asked the Panel if it only wished to see performance figures in relation to CLA and young people. The Chair commented that it would still continue to be useful to see performance figures for safeguarding issues as this provided a wide range of information for the Panel.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

121. Leaving Care Charter Review

In accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, Members agreed to consider this item as urgent for the reasons set out on the supplemental agenda.

The Panel received a report which provided information on a review of the Leaving Care Charter. An officer introduced the report and explained that the review had been led by himself, the UASC and Leaving Care Team Manager.

The Panel were advised that representatives from Beyond Limits had been involved in the review as part of a focus group. A representative from Beyond Limits addressed the Panel and made the following points:

- the Leaving Care Charter had been in operation in Harrow since 2008. It had therefore required reviewing;
- the focus group had recommended an increase in the Independent Living Grant. This would allow careleavers to purchase some essential items. Additionally this would not have a huge impact on the Council's finances;
- it was believed that educational achievement had to be recognised and rewarded. The focus group had recommended that young people who achieved a Higher National Certificate be awarded £100, young people who achieved a Higher National Diploma be awarded £150 and young people who achieved a degree be awarded £250;
- there should be an improvement in accommodation standards for careleavers. It was believed that the standard was not currently good enough and that there was a lack of support systems;
- they believed that care leavers should be supported in paying citizenship fees which amounted to approximately £836;
- it was believed that all young people should have a health passport;
- it was believed that careleavers should receive an allowance for clothing.

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

- free bus travel was available for young people between the ages of 16 to 18. However this was not applicable to other forms of public transport;
- further clarity would be provided on the £50 reward paid to young people on achieving GCSEs and the grade range to achieve this reward;
- any financial implications arising out of the proposals would be contained within existing budgets.

At the conclusion of the item, the Chair requested that officers clarify what free forms of public transport were available to young people between 16 – 18 years of age directly with Transport for London.

RESOLVED: That for the purposes of any future Cabinet or Portfolio Holder decisions:

- (1) the Panel support an increase of the independent living grant to increase from £1500 to £2000;
- (2) the Panel support the proposal to recognise and financially reward young people in higher education;
- (3) the Panel support the implementation of the Leaving Care Charter.

122. HPL Proposal

An officer reported to the Panel that as part of the budget proposals recently agreed by the Council, it had been agreed to review the semi independent living provision at 304 Honeypot Lane. As part of this review it had been proposed to close this service. Closing 304 Honeypot Lane would save the Council approximately £410,000.

It was important to note that provisions for semi-independent living had increased within the borough so services were not being reduced. There were currently 6 young people in 304 Honeypot Lane and a plan had been prepared for their re-allocation if the proposal was agreed.

A full consultation on the proposals was due to commence shortly.

In response to a query raised by a Member of the Panel officers responded that the number of young people who were displaced had been counted in the number of careleavers for whom housing support had been requested.

The Chair requested that a report previously prepared by officers on this subject be circulated to Members of the Panel via email after the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

123. Corporate Parent Display for Councillors

The Chair introduced the item and explained that it was usually the case that a Corporate Parenting stand was displayed outside a Full Council meeting on an annual basis. It was proposed that this would take place again on 4 July 2013.

Members of the Panel commented that this had been previously been very informative and had provided an excellent development opportunity for representatives from Beyond Limits.

A Member of the Panel further commented that previous training sessions conducted by representatives from Beyond Limits had been excellent and repeated in the future. The Panel therefore agreed to make a reference to the Member Development Panel that a training session on Corporate Parenting take place after the local elections in 2014 and that this be conducted by representatives from Beyond Limits

RESOLVED: That the verbal update be noted.

124. Agenda Tracker

The Chair commented that in addition to the reports requested during the meeting a report updating the Panel on education results should also be presented to the Panel at its meeting currently scheduled for 21 October 2013.

The Chair also requested that a report on health passports be presented by NHS Harrow to the next meeting of the Panel currently scheduled for 8 July 2013.

The Panel also agreed that it would wish for a report to be presented to them on dealing with mental health issues for CLA. It was agreed that it would be helpful to invite a representative from Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to the next meeting.

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

125. Any Other Urgent Business

In accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, Members agreed to consider an item relating to the timing of the Corporate Parenting Panel meetings to allow it to consider at the earliest possible opportunity its start times for the next Municipal Year.

The Chair explained that the Panel had previously made a decision to commence meetings at 7.30 pm rather than 6.00 pm. She asked Members of the Panel if they were happy to continue with these arrangements.

Following a discussion, all Members of the Panel confirmed that it would like to continue with meetings at 7.30 pm.

RESOLVED: That the item be noted.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 8.52 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR MITZI GREEN
Chairman