

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL MINUTES

28 MARCH 2017

Vice-Chair in the Chair: * Councillor Christine Bednell

Councillors: * Simon Brown * Janet Mote
* Margaret Davine * Mrs Christine Robson
* Kairul Kareema Marikar

Non-Voting Advisory Member: * Valerie Griffin

* Denotes Member present

135. Membership

RESOLVED: To note that the appointment of Councillor Margaret Davine, with effect from 15 March 2017, as a Member of the Panel in place of Councillor Mitzi Green, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 1.5 and following notification on behalf of the Labour Group Leader.

136. Councillor Mitzi Green

The Panel stood for a minute's silence in memory of Councillor Mitzi Green, former Chair of the Panel, who had passed away in January.

137. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note that no Reserve Members had been nominated to attend the meeting.

138. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Kairul Kareema Marikar declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 8 on the agenda (Health Report for Children Looked After) in that she works for the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). She would remain in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

139. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 10 January 2017 be taken and read and signed as a correct record, subject to the word “disciple” in Minute 130 (Corporate Parenting: Activity and Performance Report) being amended to read “discipline”.

140. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

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

RESOLVED ITEMS

141. INFORMATION REPORT - Health Report for Children Looked After in Harrow

Emma Hedley, Designated Nurse for Children Looked After (CLA), introduced the report. In terms of the performance on initial and review health assessments, targets had been met in all three months in the reporting period; while only 47% of initial assessments had been conducted within the 20-day timescale in January, and 86% of review assessments in February, there had been no repeat of the much lower rates which had occurred in previous periods. It was expected that health passports would be introduced for 16 and 17 year-olds by the end of June. Ms Hedley outlined contribution of the service to the Ofsted Inspection; this had included presentation of a case study, interviews with inspectors and providing information on specific cases on request. In terms of future priorities, the service was conscious of the continuing need to improve the timeliness of health assessments.

In response to Councillor Brown’s question about the factors behind the variation in the timeliness of the initial health assessments and the number of assessments being processed each month. Ms Hedley advised that about a dozen assessments were undertaken each month; given that it was more difficult to meet the 20-day target for children placed outside the Borough, the performance tended to dip when there was a high proportion of such cases. Efforts were being made to underline the importance of timely assessments, including training for a particular staff team and encouragement of managers involved. In reply to the Chair’s query about the contribution of Council staff, Ms Hedley reported that there were monthly commissioner meetings and Peter Tolley, the Head of Service, Corporate Parenting, and his staff were proactive in following up cases with social workers.

Councillor Robson asked whether the initial health assessment performance in January 2017 was an anomaly. Ms Hedley advised that this was not the case in the sense that there had previously been months in which performance had been as poor as 25%, but levels as low as this had not been experienced for some time now. Zoe Sargent, Head of Children's Services and Operations, CNWL, confirmed that the February performance was more typical of usual performance and that the Council's staff were working hard to facilitate timely assessments.

The Panel agreed that it would be helpful if the quarterly reports included a table showing performance trends over, say, the previous 12 months, as this would assist their scrutiny of this area of work. Ms Hedley agreed to provide this information in her reports.

In response to Councillor Marikar's questions, Mellina Williamson-Taylor, Head of the Virtual School, reported that about half of the children in care were educated in schools outside the Borough with no more than four or five in any particular school. A report elsewhere on the agenda gave further relevant information.

The Chair thanked Ms Sargent and Ms Hedley for their work on behalf of vulnerable children, including recent support for prospective adoptive parents, and for their contribution to the recent Ofsted inspection of children's social care in the Borough.

142. Ofsted Feedback and Next Steps - Oral Update

Paul Hewitt, Divisional Director, Children and Young People Services, informed that Panel that Ofsted's inspection report would be published on 31 March 2017, following which an action plan would be drafted. The Panel would, of course, receive a report at its next meeting focusing on the implications of the findings for services for children in care. Mr Hewitt explained the approach of the inspectors to assessing the performance of these services, including detailed analysis of ten Children Looked After cases. Informal feedback from the inspectors had been positive but had also indicated some areas for review which would be reflected in the action plan. Mr Hewitt thanked members of the Panel for their very helpful contributions to the inspection which had been commended by the inspectors.

It was noted that one of the comments of the inspectors had related to the Panel taking into account the views of children and young people in care. Members referred to the Panel's previous efforts to engage children and young people which had included visits to them away from the traditional Civic Centre environment (such as the event at the Harrow Weald centre) and also some brief informal sessions in the early evening immediately before Panel meetings. Val Griffin also mentioned the attendance of care leavers at some of the sessions for prospective foster carers. The Panel acknowledged that it was difficult to achieve meaningful engagement, but considered it important to continue these efforts; the action plan would address this point.

RESOLVED: That the oral report be noted and that the Panel receive a full report at its next meeting on 14 June 2017.

143. INFORMATION REPORT - Virtual School Mid-year Report

Mellina Williamson-Taylor, Head of the Virtual School, introduced her report which set out the progress and educational attainment of Children Looked After (CLAs) up to the end of January 2017. She pointed to the changed method of assessing education attainment which was now based on grade performance in the best eight subjects with the scoring system having been altered from letters, A (high) - G (low), to numbers, 9 (high) – 0 (low).

The Chair enquired about the factors likely to be behind the relatively poor attainment levels of Asian boys compared to previous periods. Ms Williamson-Taylor advised that this could relate to new arrivals from overseas who had not had experience of school in their previous countries of residence. This group numbered only a few children, so this trend might not be significant statistically; however, questions would be asked of neighbouring boroughs (eg. Brent) to see whether any particular factor could be identified. The largest group of low attainers continue to be White British boys and girls with as many as 45% judged as not making good progress. An intervention teacher had been employed to ask searching questions about lack of progress in such cases and to work with schools to identify appropriate responses which could include “tuition early” support. At present, there were a number of Year 6 and Year 11 children in the cohort of CLAs and it was therefore critical to ensure they were assisted in their studies.

In response to the Chair’s question, Ms Williamson-Taylor confirmed that schools were generally supportive of efforts to focus on the needs of CLAs, though these children could be more of a challenge, for example, in terms of less reliable school attendance.

Councillor Robson asked about whether there were any local issues related to obtaining Education and Healthcare Plans for CLAs. Ms Williamson-Taylor was not aware of any such issues, reporting that schools were quite good at referring children for assessment; the Council was able to use Pupil Premium funding to assist.

In response to Councillor Mote’s questions, Ms Williamson-Taylor made the following points:

- the specialist intervention teacher spent at least half her time supporting children in schools outside the Borough, including visits with social workers;
- the relative performance in securing Personal Education Plans (PEP) as between Borough schools and other schools, was quite even; information in the PEP audit would be scrutinised to identify any particular trends and suggestions made in the recent Ofsted Inspection would be also be picked up;

- a project with the Book Trust was supporting home reading, providing packages for Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 incorporating puzzles, stationery and books;
- “Nimble” electronic textbooks were also available pre-loaded with revision guides, allowing, for example, Year 9 children discretely to catch up with work from earlier year groups without concerns about embarrassment; the software also provided for staff to monitor progress more easily.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

144. INFORMATION REPORT - LGA Sector Challenge: Placement Costs

Paul Hewitt, Divisional Director, Children and Young People Services, outlined the background to the report by People Too, commissioned in response to the increasing number of children in need and intended to examine the position in the Borough compared with other London authorities and statistical neighbours. He underlined the key findings which included the following:

- expenditure per child in Harrow was in the lowest quartile nationally;
- funding was amongst the lowest in London;
- 26 of the London Borough councils had overspent their children’s services budgets;
- Harrow children’s social workers had heavier caseloads than the national average, but outcomes were still good;
- there were increasing numbers of children in need in the six most deprived wards in the Borough, accounting of the majority of referrals.

The report made a number of recommendations, including:

- improvement in placement self-sufficiency and increasing the number of “in-house” foster carers;
- developing partnership arrangements with other London Boroughs;
- being more proactive about children returning from out-of-Borough placements.

Mr Hewitt referred to the vast amount of data and analysis in the report, now brought together into one document, which would assist the Council in improving services for the growing number of children in need.

In response to Councillor Mote’s query about the apparent decline in the timeliness of adoption approvals in 2016-17, Mr Hewitt advised that the absolute number of children involved was small and that People Too had

looked at the raw data, rather than taking into account the complexity of this area. In fact, timeliness in preparing cases for the courts was good, as compared with overall timescales.

Councillor Robson reported that, at a recent conference on children's social care, she had observed the growing emphasis on regionalisation of adoption services. She underlined that informal feedback from the Ofsted inspectors had indicated their satisfaction with the Council's adoption work. Mr Hewitt and Dipika Patel (Business Intelligence Partner, Performance-Targeted and Early Intervention) added that the People Too report's information on the timeliness of adoption decisions related to a sibling group of three children where the court had sanctioned a delay due to the particular complexity of the case and in the interests of the children.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

145. Children Looked After - Performance and Activity Report

Dipika Patel, Business Intelligence Partner, Performance-Targeted and Early Intervention, introduced the report, explaining that there had been no significant variations since the January position. The number of CLAs (211) had reached a three-year high, but this reflected recent broader trends. The proportion of suitable accommodation placements was only at 73%, but there had been year-on-year improvement in this area. The figure for cases where there had been three or more moves had deteriorated since the previous year, reflecting some difficult cases in the period; however, performance was still at about the national average level. Ms Patel corrected the figure given for the percentage of CLAs with up-to-date health checks at February 2017 which should read 86.9% and not 56.9%.

In response to the Chair's question about Special Guardianship Orders, Mr Hewitt advised that three children were due to be placed for adoption in April.

Councillor Mote commended staff for ensuring dental checks for children in care were up-to-date as dental care provision was an issue in the Borough.

Councillor Robson underlined the importance of work done to avoid a child moving from child protection status to being a CLA.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

146. Agenda Tracker

The Panel noted and agreed the following anticipated items at its next three scheduled meetings:

Meeting	Item
14 June 2017	Ofsted Inspection Action Plan Adoption and Fostering: Regional Initiative Housing for Children Looked After Corporate Parenting Strategy

31 October 2017	Care Leavers Participation (<i>including Leisure Activities and Hobbies</i>) Crime/YOT
9 January 2018	Independent Review Officers: Annual Report Health Needs of Children Looked After Safeguarding (<i>to include updates regarding Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Young People</i>)

147. Any Other Urgent Business

Mr Hewitt reported that Gerry Moore had been appointed as the new Chair of the Adoption and Permanency Panel.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 8.56 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR CHRISTINE BEDNELL
Vice-Chair in the Chair