

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL MINUTES

14 JUNE 2017

- Chair:** * Councillor Aneka Shah-Levy
- Councillors:** * Christine Bednell * Mrs Christine Robson
* Simon Brown Anne Whitehead
* Janet Mote
- Non-Voting
Advisory Member:** * Valerie Griffin

* Denotes Member present

148. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

149. Appointment of Vice-Chair

RESOLVED: To appoint Councillor Janet Mote as Vice-Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel for the 2017/2018 Municipal Year.

150. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

151. Minutes

Councillor Robson advised that the declaration of interest in respect of Councillor Marikar should refer to her employment with PULSE, not PALS.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 March 2017 be taken as read and signed as a correct record, subject to the replacement of

the words “Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)” in Minute 138 with “PULSE”.

152. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

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

RESOLVED ITEMS

153. Information Report - Health Report for Children Looked After in Harrow

Emma Hedley, Designated Nurse for Looked After Children, introduced the report, explaining that the usual format had been altered to allow for the Panel to see the compliance record over the previous year. She outlined the distinction between initial assessments of children which were carried out when they came into care and review assessments which took place periodically after that. She reported on very positive meetings with the Northwick GPs and the establishment of quarterly meetings with CAMHS. Particular efforts were being made with respect to asylum-seeking children and those who were difficult to engage. For example, some intensive work had been done with two siblings who were persuaded to complete a written questionnaire which paved the way for a telephone call assessment; it was hoped that this would build the necessary confidence for future face-to-face assessments.

In the context of the Ofsted inspection report also on the agenda, Emma Hedley reminded the Panel that in 2012 the inspectors had rated the health provision as inadequate, and now in 2017, while no formal rating had been issued, the narrative in the inspection report was very positive, addressing all the previous concerns and criticisms. There had been a recommendation from the inspectors about timely therapeutic support; in response, a meeting was being held with Harrow Horizons.

In response to a Member’s question, it was confirmed that the working relationship and arrangements with CAMHS had improved significantly with all GP referrals now being accepted and meetings now including the Youth Offending Team Nurse.

Councillor Robson asked about the new health questionnaire for Looked After Children which Emma Hedley offered to include in her next report to the Panel.

Councillor Mote expressed her satisfaction that the service had improved significantly. The Head of the Corporate Parenting Service reported that the joint commission of the service with the CCG would be continued for a further two years based on the improving quality of the work and its value to the wellbeing of Looked After Children. Emma Hedley added that the service was still keen to make further improvements.

In response to a query from the Corporate Director, People Services on the CMF bid, it was confirmed that the bid did include provision for support workers to assist with the health and wellbeing of Looked After Children.

In response to Councillor Mote's query about TB screening, it was explained that while NHS England had indicated referrals should be made via GPs, efforts were nevertheless being made to the specialist TB unit. Zoe Sargeant confirmed that this had been flagged as an issue with the CCG.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

154. Information Report - Ofsted Report on the Inspection of Services for Children in Need of Protection, Looked After Children and Care Leavers

The Corporate Director, People Services introduced the report, pointing out that in recent inspections, only one authority nationally had achieved an "outstanding" rating and that council had significantly lower children's social care caseloads than Harrow. It was also notable that Harrow had lower costs than the average nationally and regionally, and also in relation to its statistical neighbours. The performance on adoption services have been very close to an "outstanding" rating. The recommendations from the inspectors which were most relevant to the Panel's responsibilities, were as follows:

- Timely therapeutic support (5)
- Quality of planning for returns from care (6)
- Implementation between reviews meetings (7)
- Extending good support from the vast majority of care leavers to all of them (8)

The Corporate Director confirmed that staff were already working on these tasks. He reported that the Council had applied to the Department for Education to become a "strategic partner", part of a programme designed to support failing authorities; the Council would engage in this when capacity allowed.

The Head of the Corporate Parenting Service considered that most of the inspectors' recommendations for improvement focused on becoming more consistent in delivering good quality services so that this was achieved in every case; one example of this was to put in place more robust plans for those returning to the family home from care.

Councillors Bednell and Mote paid tribute to all the staff and partners involved in achieving such an impressive inspection result. The Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Schools echoed this and reported that there had been a palpable and well-merited sense of pride in the achievement among staff. The Corporate Director added that these inspections were now extremely tough tests of organisation and performance, with the two London Boroughs which had been assessed since Harrow's report, having been given "inadequate" ratings. It was underlined that one of the strengths of Harrow's position was the time and attention given to producing reliable data and

business intelligence which allowed the Council to demonstrate clearly the quality of its services.

The work of the Panel itself had also been well-regarded by the inspectors. The Portfolio Holder and other panel members who had met with the inspection team, confirmed that it had been a rigorous examination and that they had been open about areas for improvement such as achieving better engagement between Panel members and children and young people in care. Val Griffin confirmed that the children had been pleased to be involved in the awards ceremony and an informal arrangement to meet Panel members was worth pursuing.

The Panel agreed that a session with children/young people in care should be arranged in the Autumn; this would be organised for the date of the next Panel meeting and would involve an informal “meet and greet” with refreshments in advance of the formal Panel meeting. The Head of the Corporate Parenting Service added that activities for children and young people were organised in any event, and Panel members were welcome to arrange their attendance at some of these to engage directly.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and that the draft action plan be endorsed.

155. Information Report - Housing for Care Leavers

Jon Dalton, Head of Housing Needs, introduced the report, explaining that plans were based on an established quota of housing units required, though if necessary, this could be extended through the use of shared housing. In practice, the usual arrangement was to lease a private rental property for, say, three care leavers. Mr Dalton had discussed with the Housing Benefit team how funding could be arranged for shared housing; he took part in regular meetings of the Care Leavers Housing Sub-Group to review arrangements. He explained that new benefit rules would come into effect limiting benefit payable for social housing tenancies to the equivalent in the private rented sector. The Council would seek to address the impact on young care leavers through greater use of studio flats.

Councillor Mote suggested that some young people could find living alone quite isolating and daunting. It was confirmed that needs assessments would pick up preferences for shared accommodation and appropriate offers would then be made.

The Corporate Director, People Services referred to the need to secure sufficient housing provision for care leavers which now comprised about half the cohort of Looked After Children; he asked how this was being addressed in the regeneration programme. The Head of the Corporate Parenting Service added that these demands would increase with the Council becoming responsible for care leavers up to the age of 25. He underlined that if the Council could not secure sufficient appropriate housing accommodation, then it would face substantial additional costs through care placements as an alternative. The Head of Housing Needs would ensure that these points were

addressed in the planning of housing supply through the regeneration programme.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

156. Information Report - Adoption and Fostering Regional Initiatives

The Head of the Corporate Parenting Service confirm that the announcement of the General Election had slowed the momentum of the Government's push toward regionalisation of adoption and fostering arrangements. In any event, Harrow was well-placed with its long-established partnership with Coram on adoption services and the plan to bid for a four-borough shared innovation project to develop fostering.

In response to Councillor Mote's query, the Head of Business Intelligence confirmed that the number of the Borough's Looked After Children was now consistently above 200.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

157. Information Report - Activity and Performance

The Head of Business Intelligence introduced the report, highlighting the following points:

- a) The demographics of the Borough were changing and this was being reflected in the numbers and profile of children being taken into care.
- b) The proportion of older children in the care cohort was increasing as was the proportion of those leaving care.
- c) There were relative high numbers receiving care in the independent sector.
- d) Care leavers were increasing achieving independent living and entering employment, education or training, but more could still be done to improve these trends.
- e) The number of children reported as missing was lower than in comparator boroughs, though this might reflect better monitoring and recording.
- f) There was a challenge in reducing the amount of persistent school absenteeism with this involving about a quarter of the cohort; there were differences related to whether the child was attending a school outside the Borough.

Councillor Bednell considered that, given their backgrounds, children in care were doing well by simply attending school and staying in foster placements. Councillor Mote also referred to the value of recognising this through the award of certificates for achieving such consistency. The Head of Business

Intelligence acknowledged that it would always be more challenging for a Looked After Child, but there was still ambition to seek improvements.

The Head of Business Intelligence looked forward to an improvement in placement stability indicators as the strategy and investment took effect. The Ofsted inspectors had recognised that Harrow was dealing with a proportionately older cohort with more placement moves than in some other boroughs. The Corporate Director underlined the importance of avoiding the breakdown of placements both for the wellbeing and development of the child concerned and also for the Council in terms of the costs and logistics of securing appropriate new care arrangements.

The Head of the Corporate Parenting Service undertook to report in future on “Edge of Care” services.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

RECOMMENDED ITEMS

158. Corporate Parenting Strategy

The Head of the Corporate Parenting Service introduced the report, explaining the Panel was being asked to make a recommendation to Cabinet to approve the strategy set out in the report.

Councillor Bednell endorsed the recognition of the role of carers in the strategy, and Councillor Mote commended the work of the Virtual School. It was suggested that the Headteacher of the Virtual School bring the tablet device for Looked After Children to the next meeting so that members of the Panel could see how it operated. Val Griffin reported that children had reacted very positively to the “letterbox” initiative with a foster child in her care saying he felt “famous” as a result.

Resolved to RECOMMEND:

That the Cabinet be recommended to approve the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2017-2019.

159. Date of Next Meeting

The Panel discussed the date for its next meeting in October and it was considered preferable to change the date from 31 October. It was therefore agreed to hold the meeting instead on Monday, 30 October 2017. Given that arrangements would be made for Panel members to meet with some young people in care on that evening, it was also agreed to start the meeting at 6.30pm to facilitate this.

Officers present:

Harrow Council Officers:

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| Chris Spencer | - Corporate Director, People Services |
| Peter Tolley | - Head of Service, Corporate Parenting,
People Services |
| David Harrington | - Head of Business Intelligence |
| Jon Dalton | - Head of Housing Needs |
| Frankie Belloli | - Senior Democratic Services Officer |

Health Authority Representatives:

- | | |
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| Emma Hedley | - Designated Nurse for CLA, CNWL |
| Zoe Sargent | - Head of Children's Services and Operations,
CNWL |

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 8.37 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR ANEKA SHAH-LEVY
Chair