

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES

30 OCTOBER 2017

Chair: * Councillor Aneka Shah-Levy

Councillors: * Simon Brown * Lynda Seymour
* Janet Mote * Anne Whitehead
* Mrs Christine Robson

**Non-Voting
Advisory Member:** Valerie Griffin

* Denotes Member present

160. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

161. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

162. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2017 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

163. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

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

RESOLVED ITEMS

164. Information Report - Participation

The Panel received a report from Shana Hart, Participation Officer, on the range of activities and engagement work with Looked After children and Careleavers. She listed a great variety of opportunities including a visit to Lords to learn about playing cricket, a trip to the Sky offices in Isleworth to learn about media work, horse-riding, go-karting, trampolining, roller-blading, a theatre trip, football training and baking classes; a visit to the UK Street Dance championships was also planned. The children and young people had also attended various sessions focused on safety and wellbeing, including health and personal hygiene, e-safety, sex education and anti-bullying. Consultation exercises also took place to obtain feedback from the children and young people on these experiences and their views on how the programme and support could be improved. The Virtual School Headteacher had attended one of the CLA activities. Overall, 43 different activities had been organised in the period, involving 91 volunteers and the participation of corporate parents at some events.

There were six children and young people in care present at the meeting for this item, and they gave their views on the programme of activities. In response to a suggestion that paint-balling be included, it was explained that as well as the genuine health and safety concerns about this activity, the cost of about £65 per participant meant it was difficult to afford. There were alternatives which were cheaper and safer, such as "Laser Tag" games. Councillors at the meeting suggested other activities such as water-based sports in the Lee Valley and a new crazy golf centre in Stanmore. While the Lee Valley option had been considered, the cost of transporting the children and young people long distances was an issue.

Shana Hart reported on fund-raising activities which had generated £2,600 in each of the last two years; this had included a successful celebration event held during the previous week. She commended the generosity of the Borough's residents and businesses in supporting these efforts. In terms of work with other boroughs, there had been a useful "LEAP" workshop held jointly with Hillingdon children and young people in care to improve conflict management skills, and Shana Hart met with other Participation Officers across London to share best practice.

In response to questions from members of the Panel, the following points were made:

- a) While the formal consultation data suggested that only a third of the children and young people knew they had a care plan, the answers to such consultation questions were often conditioned by misunderstandings of the terminology and the fact there were a number for whom English was not a first language. In practice, the understanding that care and support arrangements were in place was at a higher level even if the children and young people did not use, or respond readily to, the formal terms of "care plans".

- b) There were clear arrangements in place to deal with situations where there were difficulties in the relationship between a carer and the child or young person.
- c) Some of the young people preferred not to engage in the activity programme; this was respected by staff, but efforts were still made to discover ways in which they would be more comfortable being involved.
- d) There were opportunities for the children and young people to learn from the experiences of adults who had been in care as children and had gone on to achieve successes in their later lives; one example was hearing from someone who had obtained a doctorate at University. The annual celebration event included a motivational speaker.

Two of the young people present then spoke about their work in a local hairdresser's and nursery. Arrangements had been made with two local chefs to hold a cookery session at their restaurant. It was hoped the kitchens at Shaftesbury School could be used for similar sessions in future.

The Panel thanked the children and young people for attending and participating in the meeting. They were encouraged to express their opinions about the care and support provided to them and to suggest any ways in which problems could be addressed and services improved.

It was agreed that the updated programme of activities would be circulated to Panel members on a monthly basis so that they could decide whether to ask to be involved on particular dates.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

165. Information Report - Health of Children Looked After

Zoe Sargeant, Head of Children's Services and Operations, Central and North West London Health Trust, introduced the report and underlined the key issues arising. All the targets for initial and review health assessments had been met in the period May to September 2017, an indication of improvement in process and performance. She was pleased to report that the established TB process had now been reinstated with the Northwick Park Hospital TB team. Training had been delivered for the Harrow Council partnership induction for new social workers. The CLA health team provided training to social workers and partners regarding the adoption medical advice process; over 25 people had attended and the feedback had been positive. In terms of emotional health, referral processes and pathways were in place for children referred to Harrow Horizons – Barnardo's. The number of children referred and the outcomes of referrals were being monitored. Harrow Horizons attended joint meeting between CLA health, education, CLA Team Manager and YOT. There had been a successful event attended by over 40 care leavers which had involved a health quiz and many participated in having their of heights and weights checked.

Laurie Ward, Specialist Nurse for Children Looked After, explained the approach to engaging children and young people in health assessments; even if there was some resistance to the offer of appointments, staff would seek to carry out a telephone interview and failing this, carers and social workers would seek to engage the child or young person directly. Recently, a new health diagnostic tool had been designed so that young people could more easily assess their own health. A copy of the Young Person's Health questionnaire had been made available with the agenda.

In response to a question from Councillor Mote about the BCG vaccine, it was confirmed that due to global shortages of previous licensed vaccines, NHS England had sanctioned the use of an alternative which was not licensed at this stage but had been judged as safe. The issue had been discussed at the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Councillor Mote asked about whether consideration had been given to financial incentives to encourage engagement in health assessments. While the option had been considered, it had been decided that alternative approaches were more appropriate in the long run.

In response to Councillor Seymour's query about the flu jab, it was explained that this was sometimes used in cases of a particular health issue, but not as a matter of course unless as part of the school health flu vaccination programme.

Councillor Whitehead asked about whether a smartphone app could be used as a more effective approach to health assessment. It was confirmed that this option was being explored, including the "NHS Go" app which had been specifically designed for young people. A "handy hints" leaflet was also available specifically for young people.

In response to Councillor Mote's question about health assessments for children and young people placed out of the Borough, it was reported that the relevant NHS directive in this respect was not that clear and, as a result, practices varied across different areas, with only some health staff travelling across Borough boundaries. The local approach was a pragmatic one of accepting that travelling to neighbouring boroughs was reasonable. It was underlined that, at worst, this only involved a few days' delay.

Councillor Robson suggested that the question in the health questionnaire about self-harm, should be reworded.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

166. Information Report - Children Looked After: Performance and Activity Report

The Panel received a report on activity and performance in respect of services for Looked After children and young people in the period to the end of September 2017 (a replacement for Page 3 of the report, including the relevant headings, was tabled). The Head of Business Intelligence introduced the report, explaining that apparent decrease in the number of Children

Looked After was simply a timing issue rather than an underlying trend. The principal area of concern was the rate of persistent absence from school when compared to statistical neighbour authorities.

In response to Councillor Robson asking whether the persistent school absence was related to particular children in particular age groups, it was reported that the primary causal factor appeared to be turbulence in care placements. Those with stable, long-term placements tended to have more reliable school attendance and better educational outcomes. Val Griffin spoke of her experience as a foster carer in supporting school attendance and attainment; training on how to deal with challenging behaviour had been available to carers. The Head of Service, Corporate Parenting, reported that there was a dedicated training and development officer in the team to support the needs of carers. The Divisional Director, Children & Young People Services, acknowledged that there was a need to tackle the levels of persistent school absence; in this regard, the Virtual School Headteacher would be reporting to the next meeting.

Councillor Whitehead asked about the impact of bullying on the level of school absence and resistance, and suggested that it would be effective if other young people were engaged to mentor and support children and young people going through these difficulties. It was acknowledged that there were quite complicated factors at play in these situations and there may well be circumstances which would make this support role quite challenging for a young person. The Council used an “independent person” scheme locally to provide mentoring and support to children and young people beyond their carers and staff in the Children looked After service.

The Head of Business Intelligence referred to the improved speed of placement of children into adoption and special guardianship. The Divisional Director pointed out that while this was positive for the children and families involved, it would mean the residual cohort of children in care could become more less “stable” and therefore more challenging.

In response to Councillor Brown’s query, it was confirmed that Coram would continue to be involved in adoption services under the new “regional” arrangements since it would act as the hub for a number of authorities. The Council would therefore retain the benefits of the existing services and be able to build on these.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

167. Any Other Business

(a) Department for Education Consultation

The Divisional Director, Children & Young People Services, reported that the Department for Education had issued a consultation document on corporate parenting principles, the local offer to care leavers, and extending support from local authority Personal Advisers to all care leavers up to age 25; the consultation deadline was before the end of November 2017. The document appeared to mirror quite closely the

Council's existing practices and policies in this area, and it was therefore expected that the response would support the thrust of the ministry's proposals. The document would be circulated to members of the Panel.

(b) Agenda Tracker

It was agreed that the allocation of items for the next two meetings of the Panel be as follows:

9 January 2018: Independent Review Officers: Annual
Report
Health Needs of Children Looked After
Virtual Headteacher's Report

27 March 2018: Safeguarding (*to include updates regarding
Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing
Young People*)
Care Leavers
Crime/YOT

Officers Present

Harrow Council Officers:

Paul Hewitt - Divisional Director, Children & Young People
Services
Peter Tolley - Head of Service, Corporate Parenting
David Harrington - Head of Business Intelligence
Shana Hart - Participation Officer
Frankie Belloli - Senior Democratic Services Officer

Health Authority Representatives:

Zoe Sargent - Head of Children's Services and Operations,
CNWL
Laurie Ward - Specialist Nurse for CLA, CNWL

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 6.39 pm, closed at 7.59 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR ANEKA SHAH-LEVY
Chair