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**REPORT FOR: Corporate Parenting  
Panel**

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	7 <sup>th</sup> October 2020
<b>Subject:</b>	Corporate Parenting Update Report
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	Paul Hewitt, Corporate Director of People
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Councillor Christine Robson, Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Schools
<b>Exempt:</b>	No
<b>Decision subject to Call-in:</b>	No
<b>Wards affected:</b>	None - This is an Information report
<b>Enclosures:</b>	None.

## **Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations**

This paper provides a brief overview of the key developments within the Corporate Parenting Service during March to September 2020, particularly the response to Covid-19, Black Lives Matter and EU Settled Status and Nationality issues.

### **Future Challenges**

- Meeting our statutory responsibilities while minimising risk of Covid-19.
- Having a much-reduced office space and increased use of virtual working while ensuring workers are supported and part of a team and have the opportunity to learn and support each other.
- Potential for further increases of children becoming looked after by Harrow, including an return to usual numbers of UASC.
- Additional costs and capacity pressures for the Local Authority if there is a significant increase in the number of children requiring care.
- Understanding and addressing inequality and disproportionality in relation to outcomes and opportunities for young people and workforce

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the report be noted

**Reason for Recommendation:** To keep the Panel updated on key developments since March, as well as key challenges over the coming months.

## **Section 2 – Report**

### **Corporate Parenting Update Report October 2020**

#### **Introduction**

This paper provides a brief overview of the key developments within the Corporate Parenting Service during March to September 2020, particularly the response to Covid-19, Black Lives Matter and EU Settled Status and Nationality issues.

#### **Response to Covid-19 across Corporate Parenting**

## **Risk Assessments and virtual meetings**

Across the Corporate Parenting Service and indeed all of Children's Services, risk assessments were completed on all children and young people open to Children's social care, and decisions about face-to-face visits or virtual visits are kept under review. A RAG (red, amber, green) rating system is in place regarding risk.

We have developed a new virtual model for a large number of meetings including, Child Protection Conferences and LAC reviews, and initial feedback regarding participation has been positive.

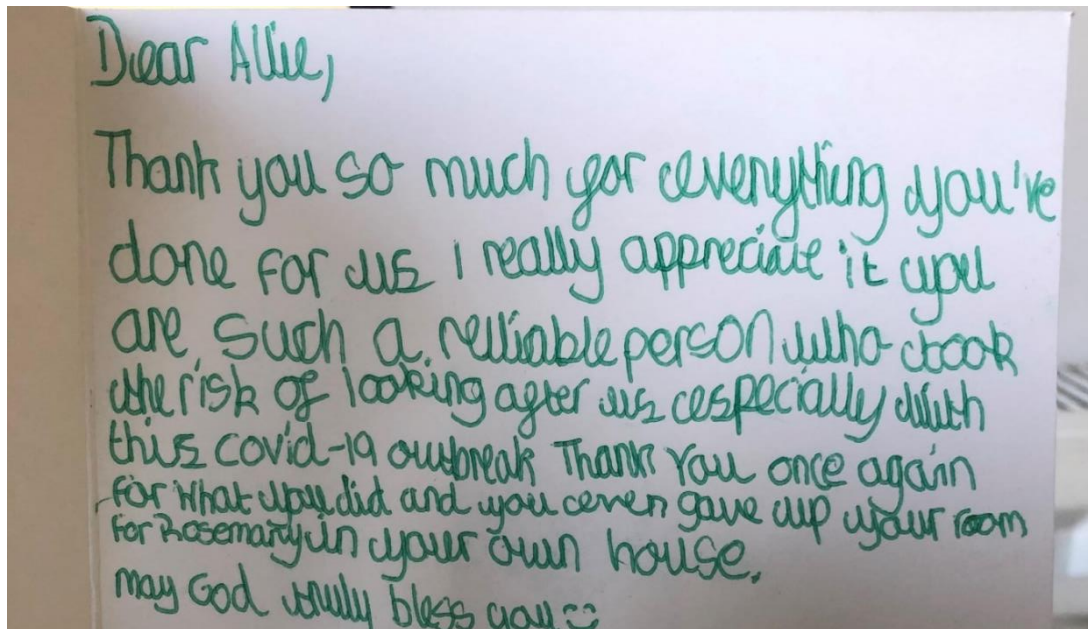
All staff have been issued with new IT devices to enable virtual working

## **Placements, Adoption and Fostering**

Our placements, adoption and fostering teams are continuing to deliver an excellent service whilst working from home, and we are finding a range of placements for children and young people despite the challenges. A virtual Access to Resources Panel commenced in July 2020, ensuring that placement suitability and cost is kept under regular review and services meet the needs of children and young people. The virtual Fostering Panel has been a success, and to date 7 panels have taken place virtually, covering new approvals and re-approvals of foster carers and 2 new foster carer households have been approved. Assessments and approvals of special guardians and connected persons to care for Harrow children has continued to take place during this exceptional period, with PPE being utilised where appropriate and in addition to virtual visits.

Harrow's adoption services are now carried out by Coram-Ambitious for Adoption, the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). Harrow adopters and special guardianship carers have been able to access immediate therapeutic support, delivered virtually, via the Covid-19 Support fund.

Although placement sufficiency was a key risk at the beginning of lockdown, particularly due to the risks to foster carers caring for potentially unwell children, we have been able to provide placement options for children and young people requiring care. Foster carers were provided with PPE where this was required. We have had a number of Harrow foster carers demonstrate enormous commitment to Harrow children. Below is a snapshot of a thank you card written by a child to a Harrow foster carer who was looked after due to Covid-19. This illustrates how much good quality foster care means to children.



A key annual event recognising the contribution of Harrow foster carers, the Foster Carers Awards Ceremony, had to be cancelled this year due to Covid-19. Our gratitude to Harrow foster carers was instead acknowledged via a special awards newsletter, with contributions from the Mayor, Portfolio Holder and Corporate Director, among other key representatives.

### **Supervised Family Contact**

After a period of suspending supervised family contact due to health risks, the contact service is back up and running at near pre-lockdown capacity. Each family is now able to have face-to-face supervised contact once per week, and where agreed, virtual family contact via telephone or zoom is also provided.

### **Children Looked After and Care Leavers**

Children who are looked after and care leavers have continued to receive a high level of service from Children's services. Social workers and social care assistants have made good use of virtual communication, including whatsapp, skype and zoom to stay in contact with children and young people where face-to-face visits were not possible due to safety issues. A number of social workers and young people have reported that they have been able to have more contact through virtual communication, and this will continue to be utilised, as well as face to face visits. Work undertaken by the Virtual School ensured that all children who needed laptops for education had these provided. A number of reusable face masks have been purchased and provided for young people and care leavers so they are able to safely use public transport and access education.

The proposed restructuring of the Children Looked After Team and the Leaving Care Team to ensure more consistency of worker and decision-making is being progressed.

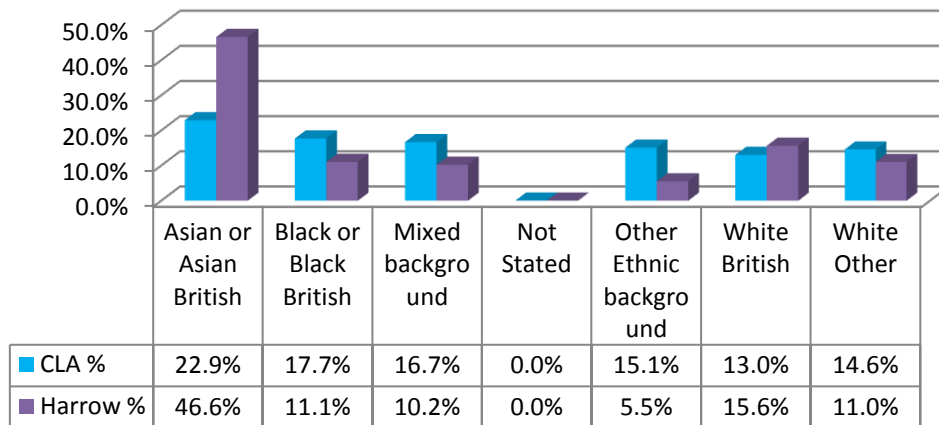
There has been an increase in children becoming looked after during recent months, and this is being analysed to understand the reasons behind the increase in children requiring safe accommodation. There have been very few new unaccompanied asylum-seeking children presenting to Harrow since March 2020, and at the time of writing, only 2 new arrivals have been accommodated by Harrow during this time. The placements team have worked closely with providers to ensure we have a provision of isolation/quarantine placements for new arrivals in the future, so that unaccompanied children can be safely cared for during the first 2 weeks of being accommodated by Harrow.

### **Black Lives Matter**

Across Harrow, Children's Services and Corporate Parenting, the issue of disproportionality, racism and the need to examine and improve practice has been brought to the forefront by the Black Lives Matter movement. There is a strong corporate and service level commitment to tackle racism and disproportionality in Harrow, and we are at the beginning of a longer journey in examining and improving our practice.

Since July 2020, Harrow Children's Services has included disproportionality toolkits and ethnicity data to examine and analyse our performance. The table below outlines the ethnicity breakdown of Children looked after in Harrow compared to the general Harrow population data. There is an overrepresentation of black or black British children, mixed background children, other ethnic background and white (not British) children in care compared to the local population. We are continuing to examine the reasons for this disproportionality across Children's services in order to address this issue effectively.

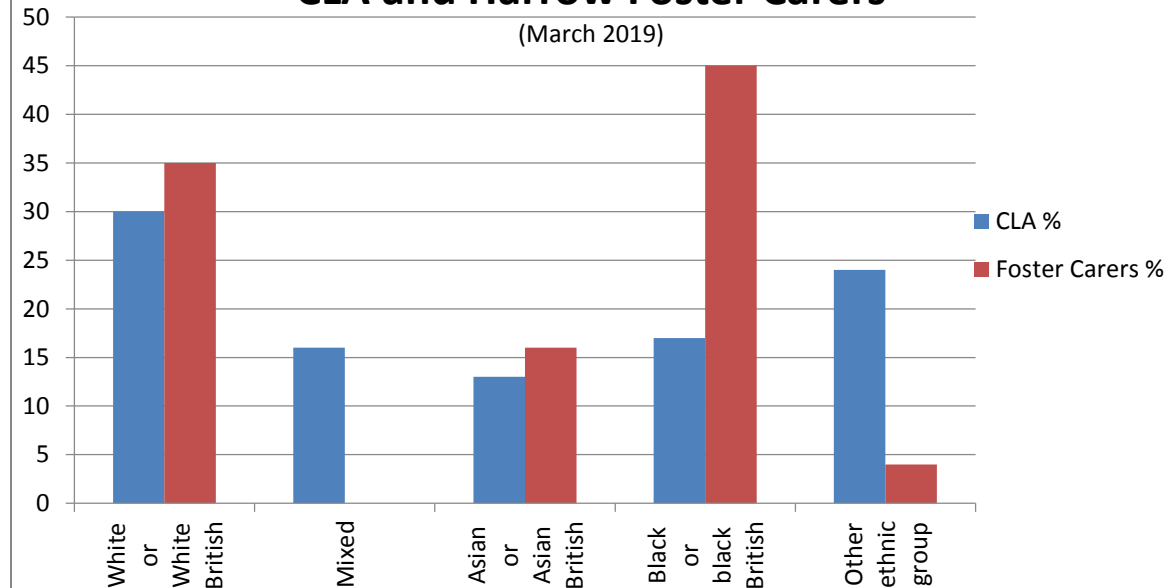
## CLA Ethnicity Breakdown



Within Corporate Parenting, the fostering team has been working for some time to ensure that foster carers are able to meet the needs of Harrow children, and aim to recruit foster carers from a wide range of backgrounds.

The table below highlights that Harrow has a strong base of foster carers from black or black British backgrounds, particularly in comparison to the percentage of black or black British children in care. The team has carried out and continues to carry out targeted recruitment of local communities to ensure we recruit a diverse range of families to meet the needs of children and young people.

## Ethnic background: Comparison of Harrow CLA and Harrow Foster Carers



## EU Settled Status and Nationality Issues

Another key area of work in response to addressing racism and discrimination has been the work of the Nationality, EUSS (European Union Settled Status) and Passport Project for Harrow Children Looked After and Care Leavers. There is a national issue of some children and young people not having their citizenship status clarified and regularised by the time they leave care. This can have significant and disastrous consequences for young people, and can impact on their ability to access benefits, housing, education, voting, and can also result in being removed or deported from the UK.

The aim of the project is to ensure that all children who are looked after by Harrow have up to date nationality and citizenship information recorded on Mosaic, as well as passports and EUSS where relevant. There are currently 40 children looked after and care leavers who are being supported by their workers to apply for EUSS. Although we have until 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021 to apply for Settled Status, we have started this project early to ensure that we identify and address the status of all CLA and Care Leavers to ensure we are acting in their best interests.

### **Future Challenges**

- Meeting our statutory responsibilities while minimising risk of Covid-19.
- Having a much-reduced office space and increased use of virtual working while ensuring workers are supported and part of a team and have the opportunity to learn and support each other.
- Potential for further increases of children becoming looked after by Harrow, including a return to usual numbers of UASC.
- Additional costs and capacity pressures for the Local Authority if there is a significant increase in the number of children requiring care.
- Understanding and addressing inequality and disproportionality in relation to outcomes and opportunities for young people and workforce

### **Options considered**

Not applicable as this is an information report.

### **Risk Management Implications**

The Children's Services Risk Register includes corporate parenting responsibilities.

Risk included on Directorate risk register? Yes

Separate risk register in place? No

## Legal Implications

The duties towards looked after children and care leavers remain unaffected by the Covid 19 pandemic. However, the Council has reviewed the way it delivers its services to ensure its staff and those it looks after are protected. This has included conducting some visits and review by virtual means and working with parents and carers to support children and young people to access education, including by virtual means where appropriate. Personal advisors have continued to support our care leavers throughout this period, including supporting them with applying for settled status. Contact with birth parents has been facilitated, however some adjustments have been made to take account of public health risks and reduction in availability of contact centre space.

## Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

## Equalities implications / Public Sector Equality Duty

Officers regularly review the data of looked after children and care leavers to identify any groups who are disproportionately represented. The update report contains information on the breakdown of looked after children and care leavers by ethnic group and information about the next steps the council is planning to take to address the differences

## Council Priorities

### Supporting Those Most in Need

- Children and young people are given the opportunities to have the best start in life and families can thrive

## Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

**Not applicable – for information only**

Name: Jo Frost

on behalf of the\*  
Chief Financial Officer

Date: 23/09/2020



Name: Sarah Wilson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Monitoring Officer
Date: 24/09/2020		

\* Delete the words "on behalf of the" if the report is cleared directly by the Chief Financial Officer / Monitoring Officer.

Name: Paul Hewitt	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Corporate Director
Date: 24.09.2020		

<b>MANDATORY</b>	
<b>Ward Councillors notified:</b>	<b>NO, this is an information report only</b>
<b>EqIA carried out:</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>EqIA cleared by:</b>	N/A information report only

## **Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers**

### **Contact:**

Jacinta Kane Head of Service Corporate Parenting  Tel - 020 8736 6617 Email - <a href="mailto:Jacinta.Kane@harrow.gov.uk">Jacinta.Kane@harrow.gov.uk</a>
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### **Background Papers:**

- N/A