

Corporate Parenting Panel

Minutes

1 February 2022

Present:

Chair: Angella Murphy-Strachan

Councillors: Dr Lesline Lewinson Kiran Ramchandani
Janet Mote Christine Robson

Councillors (in attendance): Councillor Sue Anderson Community Engagement, Accessibility & Customer Services Portfolio Holder

Officers in attendance: Paul Hewitt Corporate Director, People
Anupameya Jain Acting Assistant Head
Teacher, Virtual School
Jacinta Kane Head of Service – Corporate Parenting
Christine Nichols Named Nurse for Children Looked After in Harrow
Peter Tolley Director Children Social Care
Mellina Williamson-Taylor Headteacher, Harrow Virtual School

Absent: Valerie Griffin Councillor Maxine Henson

127. Attendance by Reserve Members

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

Ordinary Member

Reserve Member

Councillor Lynda Seymour

Councillor Dr Lesline Lewinson

128. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that the declarations of interest published in advance of the meeting on the Council's website were taken as read.

129. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 October 2021 be taken as a read and signed correct record.

130. Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were received.

131. Petitions

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received.

132. Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that deputations were received.

Resolved Items

133. Update from Care Experienced Young People about their Experiences

Members received an update from two care experienced young people on their experience of being looked-after by Harrow Council and receiving leaving care services. They shared their experiences and reported on some of the key messages received from young people at the recent Children in Care Council event held virtually.

The two care experienced young people related the following experiences:

- when transitioning from care to a care leaver, it was important to retain the same social worker. An issue for all young people was the change in social workers from childhood to adolescence and above 18 years old
- one of the young people shared that she felt that some social workers lacked empathy and this impacted adversely on vulnerable young people. Her University studies in social work had highlighted that the understanding of the word addiction was fundamental to the work of a social worker but it was sad that some social work students on her course had no grasp of its meaning. This lack of understanding would hurt vulnerable people. The Head of Corporate Parenting agreed that these were key issues and showed why the Council must listen to the voices of care experienced children and young people. The voice of young people was critical in ensuring that their needs were understood and met. The Chair agreed with these sentiments. A Member commented that empathy would come with experience and could not

be taught. It was the Council's responsibility to make changes and develop relationships between young people and social workers

- one of the young people reflected on their social work university course and shared that 'social GRRAAACCEEESSS' had to be learnt and some students appeared to lack such fundamentals. During their studies, they appeared not to have developed or matured in social work studies as they often used language that would be offensive to those in care. The cohort did try and help each other by showing different ways of addressing the same situation and by educating them further and changing behaviours.

Members thanked the young participants for their contributions and recognised the importance of being looked after by the same social worker throughout their care journey. Constant change of social workers was not good care. With Covid-19 being endemic in society, they hoped that some form of normality would return soon and normal services would resume and positive changes made could be built on. Members were enlightened by the experiences of University social work education and they hoped that the messages conveyed at this meeting had been fed back to the establishment so that improvements could be made for the benefit of future generations/students studying social work.

Members acknowledged that the experiences gained by young people present at the meeting had been gained painfully. Their experiences had also given them a step up in life but at a cost. They were pleased to learn that they continued to challenge others whilst making positive contributions to society.

The Divisional Director of Children and Young People Services thanked the young people and stated that the Council was determined to get it right for future generations of young people in care, including how his staff were managed. The Directorate had reorganised its Service area to meet the needs of young people and had recognised the detrimental effect of continuous changes in social workers. Measures had been put in place to ensure a smooth pathway for young people in care and the Children Looked After Team was now a joint team with the Leaving Care team, and children did not have an automatic change of social worker at the age of 18 years.

The Head of Corporate Parenting stated that empathy, listening skills, emotional understanding were included in workshops for social workers and as part of the probation period.

In response, a young person hoped that this aspect would flourish. The young person identified that there can be gaps in support/care provided by social workers partly because they were burdened by too many cases and in having to deal with trauma. It was also important that social workers learnt to set boundaries.

The Divisional Director of Children and Young People Services stated that he would look to involve young people in staff wellbeing training/courses.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chair thanked the two young persons for sharing their invaluable experiences and suggestions on how the Council and other establishments could improve the lives of young people in care. She would encourage all young people in care to feedback their experiences, including negative ones so that improvements could be made.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

134. Corporate Parenting Service Update and Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022 to 2025

The Panel received a presentation from the Head of Corporate Parenting providing an update on the Corporate Parenting Service and the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-25 which set out the Council's vision, achievements, foundations and the key priorities.

Corporate Parenting Service

The Head of Corporate Parenting updated the Panel on the key service areas and the performance scorecard for Q3. She referred to the last column on the scorecard – Harrow actual Q3 2021-22 – and reported that improvements were expected in the areas shaded red and amber and expected Member scrutiny in this regard. She drew attention to areas which had improved from Q2, such as in dental checks. The importance of dental checks had been highlighted with both the social workers and foster carers and it was recognised that additional improvements were required. The target was to reach 90%+ for Q4. Harrow's statistical neighbours had experienced significant declines in dental checks for CLA (42%) during the same period, which was a testament to the hard work of social workers and carers in prioritising the health needs of children in care.

With regard to health checks, the position had markedly improved. In terms of the percentage of children who ceased to be looked after who were adopted, it was important to note that there was not a target in terms of numbers of children adopted by Harrow each year, decisions were based on the individual best interests of children as part of permanency planning. She was pleased to report that 3 children had been adopted and 12 children had permanency under special guardianship orders (SGOs).

Furthermore, as discussed at the last meeting, Harrow was now caring for 30 unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC). The figure had increased in the last 3 months, but it was below the quota of UASCs the Council had agreed to accommodate.

There had been an improvement in young people accessing education, employment, and training (NEET). A Challenge Panel had recently been set up and would focus on developing plans for young people to be supported into education, employment, and training opportunities. Support was also provided by the Harrow Virtual School.

The Panel's attention was drawn to the CLA demographics and disproportionality, and Members were informed that the Asian group was

underrepresented. There had been an increase in Asian CLA from 15% to 26%. There had been a small decrease in the white and mixed race CLA.

The participation at the Children in Care Council event in January 2022 ought to be applauded and it was hoped to build-on this event and involve more young people in care. Feedback was received from care experienced young people about services and their key messages from this event were: what happened when they left care, how this could be improved and the need to have mental health services in place. A self-assessment was planned, and the Service was looking to explore the best ways in which the voices of CLA could be heard. Harrow was also aspiring to an inspection that could be led by young people in care. The Pan London Children in Care Group was also lobbying TFL (Transport for London) to provide free transport for children in care.

The Chair invited questions and comments from Member, particularly in relation to the scorecard, details of which were set out on page 15 of the agenda. Members commented as follows:

- the improvements in dental health checks, health checks and the figures for adoption and guardianship as welcomed. A Member commented that she was not in favour of setting targets for adoption which she considered to be artificial as the child and his/her future was more important than a target;
- it was understood that the backlog in respect of the timeliness of reviews for CLA was as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and that the reviews would be prioritised. It was noted that there had been an issue with the recording of this issue as a result of glitches in IT;
- the percentage of care leavers not in education, employment, or training (19-21 years old) was concerning and clarification was required. The Divisional Director of Children and Young People Services clarified that 2 in 3 children were in education/ employment /training, but he acknowledged that further improvements were required;
- that the previously established relationship with temples needed to be revitalised in order to increase the number of Asian foster carers.

The Head of Corporate Parenting referred to the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-2025 and briefed the Panel on the achievement made to date and examples of good practice. She outlined the key priorities at pages 19 – 23 of the agenda, including the aspiration, and highlighted the following achievements:

- care experienced young people were part of every interview panel to recruit social workers, after care personal advisors and managers in the Children Looked After, UASC, and Leaving Care team (introduced in 2020);

- the Council was one of the first local authorities in England to sign-up to the *Parents In and Leaving Care Charter*;
- the Harrow Local Offer to Care Leavers was refreshed following consultation with care experienced young people in 2021. Council tax exemption for all Harrow Care Leavers until their 25th birthday was introduced in April 2021;
- in 2021, the Council stayed in touch with 98% of care leavers aged 19-21, and 96% were in suitable accommodation;
- 100% of eligible children had a completed Personal Education Plan (PEP) in 2021;
- no child looked after by Harrow had a permanent exclusion in 2020-2021;
- all children were given extra tuition according to their need;
- the Staying Put policy enabled care leavers to remain with their foster carers after their 18th birthday.

The priorities for 2022-2025 were set as follows:

- education, training and employment: The Council had high aspirations and wanted to close the attainment gap for children in care. The Council would increase the proportion of care leavers in education, training and employment;
- improve the involvement and participation of young people in all services for children looked after and care leavers, with a focus on co-production, service design, delivery and evaluation;
- children looked after would be happy and healthy, safe and protected from harm and sexual exploitation: improve the physical, emotional and social health and wellbeing of children looked after and care leavers;
- safe and stable homes: The Council would provide a choice of good quality placements that provide security, stability, safety and high standards of care.

Members were delighted with the progress and the participation from young people which showed a degree of ownership. The direction from young people was welcomed. The Head of Corporate Parenting acknowledged the positive steps that had been made across the service but noted that the Council was still on a journey and building on participation for children and young people in care.

RESOLVED: That the update and the Strategy be noted.

135. Virtual School Performance Update

The Panel received an update on the performance of the Harrow Virtual School. The Headteacher of Harrow Virtual School, accompanied by another member of her team, referred to the presentation slides and reported as follows:

- the photograph on slide 1 was that of a child being looked after by the Council and was taken at an equine therapy session to help promote physical and emotional well-being;
- in June 2021, the role of the Virtual Headteacher to work was extended by the Department for Education (DfE) to support every child with a social worker. Virtual Schools were to build on their current good practice with children in care and offer evidence based interventions to support professionals working with this group. There was an emphasis on children's attainment, progress and attendance. The role was strategic and Virtual Schools were not to provide direct intervention. The guidance received from the DfE did not change existing duties for looked-after and previously looked-after children;
- the strategic leadership of Virtual School Heads for children with a social worker required Virtual Schools to narrow the attainment gap, support children's engagement in education enhance partnerships between education settings and local authorities, details of which were set out on page 42 of the agenda;
- the number of children with a social worker totalled 1552 as set out on the presentation slide on page 43 of the agenda;
- Harrow Virtual School Staffing Structure had been increased to reflect the new duties. The end of Key Stage exam predictions set out on page 45 of the agenda were above the national average for children in key Stages 1 and 2. There was an increase in the number of children predicted to achieve GCSE passes. It was important that children in Year 11 left with some qualifications and therefore support, tuition and mentoring had been made available when required;
- school attendance was 90% , however, persistent absence was at 30% across the schools. The Council promoted school attendance and punctuality for all its CLA. This message had been conveyed to carers as well. The PEP (Personal Education Plan) returns for the Autumn Term were 100% which was excellent. PEPs were taken seriously and there was continuous dialogue with schools so that where interventions were required, these were put in place at an early stage. Intervention included the provision of 1-1 tuition and/or support from a mentor;
- several issues had arisen with children with mental health problems. There had been a few suspensions and one permanent exclusion, which at the time, was in the child's best interest as there were no other alternative support;

- school absences due to Covid-19 had escalated during November and December 2021 but these had now reduced;
- the Royal SpringBoard Foundation worked in partnership with Independent Schools and the DfE to source places for vulnerable children. Harrow Virtual School had a successful outcome of a young child who had been offered a place at an Independent School with a full bursary. Her journey would be monitored and supported;
- the rationale behind Every Child Can Achieve was intended to ensure that the child did not leave school without any qualifications and a programme had been put together which included functional skills qualifications, details of which were set out on page 50 of the agenda. Such qualifications were not easier than GCSEs but offered a different approach to learning to help boost confidence;
- school priorities included a review of the education support packages for hard-to-reach students and to increase the number of CLA and Care Leavers in employment, education, and training to 75% or over. A Learning Mentor had been appointed and good systems were in place for transitions in Years 11/12. Those who had remained in further education had increased by 5%.

Members welcomed the report and praised officers for the new initiatives such as the functional skills qualification and the involvement in the SpringBoard Foundation Programme. They were proud of the achievements, including the expansion of the team. They asked what had happened to the child who had been excluded from school. The Headteacher of Harrow Virtual School reported that the child would attend the Helix which had both primary and secondary school provisions. The Virtual School had a policy in place that all children at risk of an exclusion had access to an assessment by their CLA Educational Psychologist (EP). It was not possible to have the EP assessment before the exclusion, but it happened soon after. The class sizes at the Helix were much smaller and therefore beneficial. Different teaching methods would be applied, and, in this child's case, visual learning was considered best in the child's case. The child was settled at the Helix and would remain at the school and then transition to secondary school from there.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

136. Information Report – Harrow Children Looked After (CLA) Health Report

The Panel received a report and a presentation from a representative (Named Nurse from CLA Harrow) of the Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust.

The report set out the delivery of health services to Harrow's Children Looked After (CLA) during April - June 2021 in line with the national guidance. The report reviewed the service and included clinical work undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Named Nurse referred to her presentation circulated with the agenda and outlined the KPIs (key performance indicators) set by the Harrow CCG (clinical commissioning group) and Harrow Council which was to achieve 100% compliance in respect of initial health assessments and review health assessments of CLA within a required period.

The Named Nurse added that reporting by exception was key in capturing those young people who refused health assessments, were placed out of the borough, identify missing children and where requests had been received late. The CLA team also assisted the Council in providing services such as records of dental and optician checks, immunisation status and monitor GP registration of CLA. She referred to the slide which set out the KPIs for Harrow CLA from July to December 2021 and explained that:

- the number of CLA seen for IHA (initial health assessment) from July until December 2021 had ranged from 67% - 100% which was an achievement. Those seen for RHS (repeat health assessment) ranged from 93% - 100% and ought to be applauded
- the lower figure of 82% IHA for October 2021 was as a result of two CLA falling outside the timescale of 20 operational days/28 calendar days. Attempts had been made to avoid this situation, but it was the only time that this had happened given the Covid-19 pandemic
- the CLA team had experienced issues around DNA.

The Panel was also advised that, in relation to Covid-19 immunisation, the requirements for health and social care staff to be double jabbed was subject to change by recent government announcement.

Members were also informed of:

- training and meetings attended by the CLA team as outlined on pages 67 and 68 of the agenda. Further training to tier 4 was being sought to ensure involvement in discharge planning. Clinical supervision training was being sought for help those children experiencing mental health issues;
- new processes, including projects, that the CLA team were taking forward which would assist both the team and help support young people better. These measures were outlined on page 69 of the agenda. The VVE team would provide the CLA team with weekly and timely updates in respect of the health assessments and to explain the reasons for any assessments missed which would help counteract those missing;
- the Peer Review of the Harrow CLA Service had had a positive outcome and the team was developing templates which would help extract data in an efficient manner. This would help to develop and move the service forward for the benefit of young people;

- the challenges around dental health checks appeared to have been resolved and foster carers were provided with relevant contact details;
- and, where appropriate, referred to the Harrow Community Dental Services for urgent treatment.

Members were pleased with the positive outcomes in respect of dental health and enquired about the how health assessment had been and were being conducted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Named Nurse informed the Panel that the default position was face-to-face meetings. If a young person had tested positive for Covid-19, then the assessment would be carried out virtually, including for those not willing to engage. A Member recognised that there were advantages and disadvantages in all modes of delivery, but a face-to-face approach was considered beneficial as it helped to build relationships. She also recognised that some young people might be more 'open' if assessments were conducted virtually and that others might be unforthcoming.

Members applauded the joined up working between the CLA team and the Council's social workers and the work carried out in addressing the backlog.

The Named Nurse thanked Members for their support and referred to the Corporate Parenting Strategy at agenda item 8 which aspired to engage with young people. She suggested that both authorities would benefit by working jointly which would also help to improve services. This was welcomed by the Council's Head of Corporate Parenting.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

137. Urgent Business

Date of Next Meeting

The Chair proposed that, due to the proximity of the next meeting of the Panel scheduled to be held on 24 March, and the time required for officers to prepare reports, the meeting be deferred until September. Members agreed and it was

RESOLVED: That the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel scheduled to be held on 24 March 2022 be deferred until September 2022, Municipal Year 2022/23.

A 'Thank You'

Members of the Panel who would not be standing for re-election in May 2022 took this opportunity to thank officers and all participants for their work. They were proud of the vast improvements made in the delivery of Corporate Parenting during their terms in office and in ensuring that the duties and responsibilities of a local authority in respect of the CLA (children looked after) were being met.

The Corporate Director of People Services thanked Members and young people for their support. He thanked Members for the cross-party support his

Service continued to receive in meeting the Council's role as Corporate Parents.

The Chair spoke of her gratitude in the work carried out by the outgoing Councillors and in ensuring the continued development of Children's Services. She thanked all Members, officers, partners and young people for their participation. She also thanked the Corporate Director for his good leadership.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 6.02 pm, closed at 7.54 pm).

(Signed) Councillor Angella Murphy-Strachan
Chair