

Meeting:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date:	25th November 2008
Subject:	Care Matters Update – Harrow’s response to the Children and Young Persons Bill 2007
Responsible Officer	Paul Clark Corporate Director of Children’s Services
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Christine Bednell, Portfolio Holder For Children’s Services
Exempt	No
Enclosures	Care Matters Update Report

Section 1 – Summary

Report to update Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Harrow’s response to the Children and Young Persons Bill 2007 which will significantly progress the Care Matters agenda

Recommendations:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the contents of the attached update on Harrow’s response to Care Matters and to provide comment.

Reason:

For Information

Section 2 – Report

2.1 The Children and Young Persons Bill is designed to reform and strengthen the statutory framework around the care system.

2.2 The Bill contains a range of initiatives and provisions that aim to enable children and young people in the care system to receive high quality care (see attached report, Corporate Parenting)

2.3 The provisional timetable is that the Bill receives Royal Assent in late 2008.

2.4 The Life Chances Forum has endorsed the suggested areas that will benefit from the Care Matters grant. The grant is calculated to cover the cost of extra services to young people Looked After.

Over the last four years Harrow Council has:

- Improved Services for Children Looked After by discussing with them and foster carers the areas in need of improvement.
- Reduced the cost of placements and improved the quality of placements.
- Improved the support for Children Looked After in achieving at school.
- Given Children Looked After a voice of their own - Young Voices Group and developed the advocacy service.

The bill has not yet gained Royal Assent. The provisions will be brought in over the coming year. Harrow will develop and deliver services within the grant funding available.

Performance Issues

- The key performance indicators for our work with Children Looked After are attached (appendix 2 Children Looked After Indicators Q2)
- We have a story of improving performance.
- There are no new risks in the Children's Bill.

Possible Requirements

- Harrow Council has worked to improve both the services and outcomes for Children Looked After.
- The new Bill will support much of our work but will focus national and public attention on council work with these vulnerable children.

Section 3 – Further Information

Enter any other relevant information
eg whether issue not closed
whether there will be further updates and when
whether a report will be submitted in the future

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Report Author's name, Job Title, direct telephone number

Background Papers: List **only non-exempt** documents relied on to a material extent in preparing the report. (eg previous reports) Where possible also include electronic link.

Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact

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1.	Consultation	YES / NO
2.	Corporate Priorities	YES / NO

Appendix 1: Corporate Parenting Report

	Children Bill Change	Harrow Current Practice	Areas for Improvement Cost/timescale	Comments/options/risks
1	More young people should stay looked after until they are 18 if they so wish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No young person is de-accommodated in Harrow unless it is safe to do so; there is an effective alternative and there is agreement with the young person ▪ We have a proactive advocacy service in Harrow in the event of any disputes around the care plan ▪ Plans by the Local Authority (LA) are monitored by the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The challenge for Harrow, in line with other LAs, is securing high quality placements in the local area ▪ We regularly review need with what is available in terms of fostering and residential provision so that we can place young people quickly ▪ Harrow is also part of the “Pan London Consortium” of LAs who share information about available and high quality placements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If more young people remain looked after, and want to, say, be in a foster placement this may have an impact on foster placements for “new” children looked after. ▪ This may then have a financial impact – more in house placements, more independent placements, including residential

	Children Bill Change	Harrow Current Practice	Areas for Improvement Cost/timescale	Comments/options/risks
2	<p>The Bill re-affirms the pivotal role of the Council's Lead Member for Children in championing the Council's role as "corporate parents" and the needs of Children Looked After (CLA)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We have an active Corporate Parenting Panel which receives regular management information reports; benchmark with the work of other LAs; meet with young people; and who request updates on service developments ▪ We have an officer led multi agency Life Chances Forum that consider areas for improvement and development which reports directly to the Corporate Parenting Panel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Corporate Parenting Panel continues to involve the wider Council by convening special interest events and meetings with young people ▪ We are in the process of considering how best to use the monies from Cares Matters to target specific areas for improvement ▪ An update will be provided to Corporate Parenting Panel on 6.10.08 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Government funding is limited and any initiatives will require consideration as to how they can be maintained over a longer period

	Children Bill Change	Harrow Current Practice	Areas for Improvement Cost/timescale	Comments/options/risks
3	<p>The Bill places a responsibility on the role of the designated teacher (who has an overall responsibility for the well being of CLA in the school) on a statutory footing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We have effective working relations with schools in Harrow. Attendance and results for CLA are good ▪ We are reviewing the impact of PEPs (Personal Education Plans) to consider how we can improve our performance in this area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Attendance and results for CLA who are placed out of the LA are not as good ▪ We are in the process of considering how best to use the monies from Cares Matters to improve in this area. ▪ An EWO (Education Welfare Officer) for CLA has been appointed. ▪ We are in the process of recruiting to a PEP Coordinator. ▪ 3 Virtual Heads have been appointed ▪ These posts would have a key role in championing the education needs of CLA placed in and outside the LA ▪ We are costing the best way to provide additional tutoring for CLA ▪ We will broaden the Achievement Payments to include effort, attendance as well as achievement. ▪ We are budgeting for the continuing use of Welfare Call, who provide daily information about which CLA are not attending their respective education provision ▪ We are reinstating the “Chance to Shine” Homework Club 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Government funding is limited and any initiatives will require consideration as to how they can be maintained over a longer period ▪ Government guidance is required as to how the role of the designated teacher can be made more effective – for example, in challenging a school’s policy and practice – particularly for CLA who are not the responsibility of that LA

	Children Bill Change	Harrow Current Practice	Areas for Improvement Cost/timescale	Comments/options/risks
4	The Bill seeks to ensure that CLA do not move schools, for example during SATs and especially GCSE years except in “exceptional circumstances”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We monitor placement moves on a monthly basis by way of the Service Managers Performance Management Meetings within Children Services. Placement moves have to be agreed by a Senior Manager ▪ The IROs monitor moves and will take up the matter with the LA if such moves are not done in “exceptional circumstances” ▪ It is now understood as a “custom and practice” that CLA are not moved during these periods unless in “exceptional circumstances” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The largest proportion of when children become looked after is the 10-15 years of age range – at the time when this requirement kicks in. ▪ The challenge for councils and schools is how best to ensure placement stability as well as offering the best possible education for this cohort 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Government guidance is required as to the definition of what constitutes “exceptional circumstances”
5	The Bill places a new duty on local authorities to appoint an Independent Visitor for all looked after children, and extends the duty to other groups of children who were looked after but have ceased to be so, such as young people in custody	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We provide access to independent visitors but within the present Government definition, that is for children who do not have relatives who visit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We are in the process of considering how best to use the monies from Cares Matters to improve in this area. ▪ We are in the process of expanding the provision of the Independent Visiting service in line with the Children Bill ▪ Gail Hancock has met with Julia Smith, Harrow Association of Voluntary Services, who are interested in coordinating this provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Government funding is limited and any initiatives will require consideration as to how they can be maintained over a longer period

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6	<p>The Bill will restrict the placement of CLA out of the locality and, in particular, if by doing so will require a change of school</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We have restructured the payments to our existing carers and undertaken the successful recruitment of in house carers ▪ Care planning is closely monitored through the review process, the Child Care panel and the Permanency Panel (for children in proceedings) ▪ We now have more children with in house carers than either with independent carers or in residential ▪ Our proportion of CLA with relatives is also increasing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This is an area which requires regular monitoring, in terms of the need, care planning, choice of placements, and the level of support available to ensure that the right placements are available to begin with and that there is the support to decrease the potential for further placement moves ▪ We are improving in terms of the number of CLA who are in placements within a 20mile radius of Harrow – 19 out of 22 since April 1st 2008 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Again this is an area that requires close monitoring as placements out of the authority are generally more expensive
7	<p>The Bill will require LAs to pay a bursary to a former relevant child (i.e. a care leaver) who goes on to Higher Education. The amount talked about is £2000</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We currently assist care leavers who go on to Higher Education by providing the means to hold on to their accommodation/placements. ▪ We also have an agreement whereby we can defer when they can be nominated for their own accommodation, if not already in one, to, in this instance, when they complete their course 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We are in the process of considering how best to use the monies from Cares Matters to improve in this area. ▪ We are in the process of budgeting for this (welcomed) contingency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Government funding is limited and any initiatives will require consideration as to how they can be maintained over a longer period

	Children Bill Change	Harrow Current Practice	Areas for Improvement Cost/timescale	Comments/options/risks
8	The Bill requires LAs to respond positively to the views of young people in relation to whether and when they should be moved to more independent accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It is now “custom and practice” that 16 and 17 year old are not automatically moved to more independent accommodation. It is done by need and in consultation ▪ We currently have the scope to allow young people turning 18 to remain with their carers under supported lodgings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This is area which requires regular monitoring, in terms of need, life skills development, choice of placements, and the level of support required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This is an area that requires close monitoring to ensure that the right placements are available for new children looked after
9	The Bill seeks to improve support for family and friend carers, to include the provision of longer term payments by the LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We are developing more consistent packages of support for family and friends by ensuring that appropriate assessments are done in a timely fashion. ▪ We have established a pathway by which we can assess family and friends for a Special Guardianship Order, together with their financial requirements, so that they can be presented to the Adoption and permanency Panel for approval 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We are not always able to access family support easily. For example, some parents that we work with will not, for one reason or another, provide us with that information ▪ We are reinstating the Family Group Conferences facility to convene/coordinate family based solutions for care/contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Government guidance will be useful in relation to how we can more easily gain details of other family members so that that contingency plans can be made “in the event of” rather than waiting for say a Court to make such a direction