

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

13 JANUARY 2009

Chairman: * Councillor Janet Mote

Councillors: * Husain Akhtar * Mitzi Green
Miss Christine Bednell * Eric Silver
* Mrs Margaret Davine

* Denotes Member present

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL**PART II - MINUTES**62. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance at this meeting.

63. **Declarations of Interest:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no declarations of interests made by Members in relation to the business to be transacted at this meeting.

64. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 October 2008 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

65. **Matters Arising:****Minute 57: Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice**

The Chairman informed the Panel that, following the discussion that had taken place at the previous meeting, an information stand would be placed outside the Council Chamber at the next Council meeting on 2 April 2009. She explained that the purpose of the exhibit was to raise Councillors' awareness of their Corporate Parenting responsibilities. In addition to the stand, the Chairman stated that the Senior Co-ordinator for Children Looked After would be in attendance and would distribute copies of a booklet entitled "Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice", a document that would provide Councillors with additional information regarding their responsibilities. A number of Members requested that, if possible, the exhibit include a video presentation. The Chairman agreed that the use of a video presentation would be favourable.

The Panel unanimously agreed that, whilst the exhibit would be beneficial in raising awareness amongst Councillors that had limited involvement with Looked After Children, formal training was still needed. The Chairman informed the Panel that the Member Development Team was aware of the need to provide Corporate Parenting training and that, in her opinion, the training should be compulsory. Following a discussion, it was agreed that the Chairman would write the Chairman of the Member Development Panel to highlight the need for action.

Minute 60: Care Matters Update – Harrow's response to the Children and Young Persons Bill 2007

An officer informed the Panel that the Children and Young Persons Bill had received royal assent in November 2008 and that the Council were currently awaiting draft guidance. He explained that the Children and Young Persons Bill was only part of the Care Matters reform package and that it would be supported by additional regulations as well as proactive partnerships with local authorities to share and develop good practice.

An officer stated that she had presented the Care Matters proposal to a number of bodies and reception had been both supportive and positive. She explained that the proposal was still to be reviewed by Children Looked After Life Chances Forum but that it would most likely continue in its current form for the next few years, with slight revisions made when necessary.

A Member queried whether a Personal Education Plan (PEP) Coordinator had yet been appointed. The Panel were informed that the Council was working hard to fill the post but, despite utilising recruitment agencies and offering a competitive remuneration

package, the position remained vacant. However, an officer assured Members that she was confident that the position would be filled in the near future.

Minute 61: Adoption Inspection

An officer informed the Panel that the Council had met and surpassed its adoption target for the year, and that Members would be provided with a more detailed update shortly. Members requested that the information be made available to them as soon as possible, but that a verbal update also be provided at the next Corporate Parenting Panel.

66. **Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations:**

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put, or petitions or deputations received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum procedure rules 16, 14 and 15 respectively.

67. **INFORMATION REPORT - Approval of a London Pledge for Children Looked After:**

The Panel received an information report of the Corporate Director of Children's Services which provided an update on the London Pledge, an initiative that aimed to ensure children and young people in care across London had equal access to key services. The report also detailed the potential cost implications if the recommendations were fully implemented.

An officer drew the Panel Members attention to section 2.5 of the report which detailed the costs involved in producing information packs for Looked After Children. The officer explained that whilst the packs were highly beneficial for those within the care system, printing the documents could be expensive, especially if made available in multiple languages.

Following a question from a Member regarding the possibility of distributing the information electronically via a website, the officer explained that such a scheme might not be feasible. The officer explained that the information packs were usually given to an individual at their Viewpoint (VP) session, with the VP officer ensuring that the information was understood. As the distribution of the information was monitored, there was a certain degree of quality assurance that could not be guaranteed if an individual was to access the information independently via the internet. The officer stated that the internet could be used as an additional method of distribution but that the printed documents were still required.

Another officer informed the Panel that, in accordance with the Pledge, the Council would be expected to provide a range of opportunities for Looked After Children including free leisure cards to access facilities across London. In addition, the Council would be required to support the purchase of a bike and related safety equipment. The officer stated that, whilst he had calculated the potential cost of the schemes, he was still considering how they could be implemented effectively. However, he stated that the Pledge was essentially a blueprint that needed to be refined on both a local and individual level in order to suit both the authority and the individual children it served. The officer explained that different children would require different pledges and that the Council needed to be flexible in order to cater for individual needs. Another officer added that the primary concern of the pledge was to improve the life-chances of Looked After Children by ensuring they were offered the same opportunities and experiences as children growing up in traditional families.

A Member requested an update on the status of the bid made to the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), sought in order to secure funding for IT equipment for Looked After Children. An officer informed that Panel that the Council had secured the sum of £95,000 and that it was intended that the money would be used to purchase laptops, acknowledging that the equipment needed to be portable.

Following a discussion concerning the educational achievement of Looked After Children, some Members of the Panel raised concern that the Pledge placed too great an emphasis on the attainment of good GCSEs and, for some children, such targets were unattainable. Members queried whether the wording of the Pledge needed to be altered to take into account non-academic personal achievements. An officer assured the Panel Members that there would be an individual pledge for every child and targets would always be realistic. However, the officer stated that performance indicators were important and educational attainment did need to be both promoted and monitored.

The Chairman stated that the Council had previously organised sessions in conjunction with carers during which Looked After Children were presented with personal achievement awards. She suggested that, whilst non-academic achievements were hard to measure, acknowledging personal success was likely to be highly beneficial to the individual. An officer informed the Panel that the Council intended to revive the scheme.

A Member suggested that it was important not to underestimate the academic ability of those in care and recommended that, as corporate parents, local authorities should set high expectations, just as traditional parents would.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

68. **INFORMATION REPORT - Activity and Performance:**

The Panel received an information report of the Corporate Director of Children's Services which set out key data relating to Children Looked After (CLA) and Children on the Child Protection Register (CPR), including key performance indicators up to the end of November 2008. An officer outlined the following key points and issues:

- the Council had exceeded its adoption and special guardianships target;
- whilst core assessment performance had dropped, action was being taken to prevent any further decline;
- participation of Looked After Children in reviews was higher than the statistics indicated as some new data had yet to be included in the results;
- long term stability of placements was over 60%, although the figure was likely to fall due to the policy of pursuing adoption or special guardianships for those that had remained in long term placements;
- there were now 3 CLA in secure units.

In response to questions concerning the use of secure accommodation, officers clarified that:

- children were placed in secure accommodation when they posed a high risk to either themselves or those around them. Such action was seen as a last resort;
- the placement of a child in secure accommodation was reviewed by the Courts on a monthly basis;
- the use of secure accommodation cost the Council approximately £4,000 per week for each child.

Following questions from the Panel concerning the age at which Looked After Children were offered the opportunity to live independently, officers explained that such arrangements were available from the age of 16, provided the individual in question was considered capable. Semi-independent accommodation was provided in the first instance for 16-17 year olds. However, although individuals were given the opportunity to live independently, the Council continued to monitor their progress to ensure that the arrangements were working.

Following a general discussion concerning the data provided in the report, officers clarified that:

- the CLA population was never static and, though some trends existed, it was not possible to predict fluctuations with absolute certainty;
- the data collected by the performance team was used by managers to identify and target specific issues. Updates were provided to the Head of Service on a monthly basis;
- officers had access to more detailed data than that included in the report. At the request of Panel Members, officers agreed to provide more detailed data at future meetings;

- it was possible to benchmark Harrow's performance against that of other authorities, although such comparisons were generally limited to Councils that fell within the same statistical neighbourhood group. At the request of Panel Members, officers agreed to try and provide as much benchmarking data as possible at the next meeting.

The Panel noted that there had been a significant improvement in the educational achievements of Looked After Children within the borough and recommended that the Council publicise the accomplishment. Officers agreed to prepare an article for borough-wide circulation. The Chairman supported the proposal.

In response to questions from the Panel regarding the logging of non-GCSE qualifications, the officer explained that this was something that the Council was eager to pursue. She stated that the Council currently utilised the services of "Welfare Call" to monitor truancy levels amongst Looked After Children and, for an additional fee, the company could also monitor the educational achievements of pupils. The officer suggested that this was an area where the Care Matters grant could be put to good use.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

69. **Any Other Urgent Business:**

Consultation on Changes to the Admission Rules for Harrow Community Schools from September 2010

An officer tabled a document outlining the consultation on changes to the admission rules for Harrow Community Schools from September 2010. The officer detailed the proposed key changes and explained that the document was being provided for information purposes as the proposed alterations would impact upon Looked After Children in the borough.

Harrow Foster Carers Association Annual Event

An officer informed the Panel that the Harrow Foster Carers Association were due to hold their annual event and recommended that the Corporate Parenting Panel send a representative. It was agreed that full details would be forwarded to the Chairman.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 6.05 pm, closed at 7.25 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JANET MOTE
Chairman

Appendix 1**Officers in
attendance:**

Andreas Kyriacou

Senior Co-ordinator, Children
Looked After

Gail Hancock

Head of Service for Safeguarding &
Family Support

Dipika Patel

Senior Performance Officer