

Meeting:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date:	21st April 2009
Subject:	Children Looked After Pan London Pledge
Responsible Officer:	Paul Clark, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Christine Bednell, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	None

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1. This report sets out the progress on the London Pledge, which aims to ensure that children and young people in care across London have equal access to the same range of key services.
- 1.2. Reports on the cost implications if the Pledge is fully implemented and the ways by which this may be funded

Recommendations:

- 1.3 This report is for Committee to consider and to provide direction.

Reason: (For recommendation)

- 1.4 The London Pledge was signed off on behalf of the Local Authority at a London wide launch on 25th November 2008.
- 1.5 The London Pledge has been developed by way of a number of consultation events involving London Local Authorities, Members, Senior Officers and Young People. It is seen as providing a consistent service framework to all Children looked after irrespective of their locality

Section 2 – Report

2.1 The London Pledge addresses a number of principles as well as the 5 Every Child Matters outcomes.

2.2. Harrow Council will honour a number of **Principles** to our Children Looked After. It states that as Harrow Council:

- *We will only promise you things that we know we can do.*
- *We will care for you as an individual person with your own specific needs, which we will plan to meet.*
- *You will have the opportunity to talk to your social worker alone every time he/she visits you.*
- *We will always involve you in the decisions we take for you.*
- *We aim to be the best as parents and to make your experience of being looked after a positive one.*
- *We want you to be healthy, safe, have fun and gain achievements for yourself, to make a positive contribution to your community and to leave care able to make your way successfully in life. We will support you to achieve all this.*
- *We will have expectations of you as well and we will make these clear to you.*
- *We will listen to you as individuals and as a group and we want you to tell us when you meet us whether we are keeping our promises.*
- *We will take account of your particular needs, especially those relating to disability, race, culture, religion and sexuality. We will take account of anything that is leading to you being treated unfairly and will give you support to overcome it.*
- *We will ensure that you receive your full set of rights, as set out in relevant legislation, regulations and guidance and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.*
- *We will also ensure that you receive your London Pledge entitlements, wherever you live. Any failure on the part of Councils and their partners to deliver this will be promptly resolved*

2.3. In relation to **Health** Harrow Council will work to ensure that children looked after have access to a range of relevant health services, which promote and support their emotional, physical and mental health and support them to make healthy and positive choices with your lives. It states that as Harrow Council:

- *We will work to make sure that doctors, dentists and other health professionals are trained to understand your individual needs and listen to your problems so that they can give you the best possible support and treatment.*
- *We will work with others to ensure that you get better access to the information you need and the right support to help you with any health or emotional difficulties that you may have, especially if you live outside your home authority.*

- *We will ensure that we have good systems in place to share information across borough boundaries so that you do not miss out on medical appointments because you move areas.*
- *Parents or carers will have access to information, services and support that will help them to care for you and give them with the skills they need to ensure that you have the best chances in life and are healthy and safe*
- *We will ensure that you receive your vaccinations, dental checks and other health checks at the right time and that you and your carers are given the relevant information to support you in accessing healthcare services*
- *When appropriate we will ensure that you have access to the relevant sexual health information and support to enable you to make positive choices about your future.*
- *We will make sure that you have opportunities to develop your personal and social skills to care for your health and well-being now and in the future*

2.4 In relation to staying **Safe**, Harrow Council will work to keep children looked after safe from harm by individuals and their environment. Harrow Council will ensure that children looked after know how and where to access help if they feel threatened or are hurt in any way and will ensure that professionals and carers know how to support those children looked after who have been harmed or hurt. It states that as Harrow Council:

- *All agencies will work to prevent you suffering harm and to promote your welfare, provide you with the services you require to address your needs and to safeguard those of you who are being or who are likely to be harmed.*
- *We will have clear arrangements and protocols in place to safeguard you if you run away or go missing from care. These arrangements will be regularly reviewed.*
- *We will involve you in the selection of staff working with or for children and young people and the training of new social workers and foster carers.*
- *We will ensure that you get good information about your placement and a proper introduction to your carers (unless you have to move in an emergency). When you are moved to a new area you will receive information about the area and how to access services.*
- *We will ensure that you have access to youth support services and a Connexions adviser. If you need it additional guidance relating to your personal health and safety is available.*
- *If you get into trouble with the police and end up in custody we will make sure that the most suitable person comes along to support you.*

- *We will do our best to give you a choice in the selection of your own foster carer or placement.*
- *We will do our best to reduce the number of changes of social worker that you experience while you are in care*

2.5. In terms of **Enjoy and Achieve**, Harrow will work to ensure that children looked after have access to a broad range of positive activities and opportunities that provide them with places to go and things to do wherever they are. It states that as Harrow Council:

- *We will encourage and help you to access good quality affordable social, cultural and leisure activities, both in your community and across London.*
- *By 2011 we will provide you with a free leisure card to access facilities across London up to the age of 21. This will include free access to gyms and major cultural attractions.*
- *We will support you to purchase a bike and safety equipment and we will organise proficiency training if it is something that you would like and that your carers agree.*
- *We will work together across London to support you to achieve five A* to G at GCSE or equivalents. We will ensure that you have better access to personal computers and other materials that you may need for your education and that you are able to access the full range of educational opportunities open to your peers. We will pay particular attention to supporting you at key transition stages in your lives and ensure that you and your carers have access to high quality information, advice and guidance that supports you to make the right choices about your future.*
- *We will work with schools, colleges and universities to ensure that you are championed to succeed in your education. In school you will have the support of your designated teacher and a governor champion and you will have a high quality, clear and up to date Personal Education Plan that will meet your needs and push you to succeed.*
- *If you are leaving care for university or vocational training we will ensure that your Pathway Plan is clear about the support you will receive, including our financial contribution to your studies.*
- *We will make sure that you have access to a computer and materials needed for your education and training. We aim to provide you with a laptop or computer at Key Stage 3 and beyond and appropriate software, providing you remain in education and training.*
- *Where appropriate we will support you to access vocational opportunities and/or apprenticeships that will enable you to achieve your full potential*

2.6. In terms of **Empowering to make a Positive Contribution**, Harrow will work to ensure that CLA voices are heard and that they are able to participate fully in decision making about their lives and the services that affect them. It states that as Harrow Council:

- *We will consult you about all our services that affect you.*
- *We will make sure that you know your rights and what services you are entitled to by putting this down in writing for you. We will also agree with you what we expect from you and put it down in writing.*
- *We will organise meetings for children and young people who are looked after by a Council in London so that we can hear from you about how you think we can best plan to meet your needs as a group and you can tell us whether we are keeping our promises.*
- *We will celebrate and promote your achievements with you, as well as the contribution you make to the community. This will also include marking your birthday; your religious festivals and making sure you have a copy of your school photo and reports.*
- *In cooperation with your parents or carers we will ensure that you have a passport or know why you don't have one.*
- *Once you get to 16 years old we will ask you whether you want a mentor (e.g. 16+ worker) and arrange one for you if this will be helpful.*
- *We will also offer you the chance to set up and participate in a peer-mentoring programme for London. This will involve care leavers supporting young people still in care to grow and achieve.*
- *In addition to your social worker, carer, family member, independent reviewing officer and designated teacher, we will make sure that there is another way to tell us if you are unhappy about anything or have a complaint. We will let you know how to contact this person (an advocate) in writing and they will speak for you if you want them to.*
- *We will also support you to contact your lead Member, Director of Children's Services and senior managers as necessary and you will be listened to by them.*
- *We will work with others to provide you with information about volunteering and access to opportunities to help others.*

2.7 In terms of **Achieving Economic Wellbeing** Harrow will support CLA to achieve economic independence and well-being as they progress into adulthood, recognising that CLA need certain skills and support to live independently. Harrow will take the relevant steps to prepare CLA

- *We will open a savings account for you if you have been in care for more than 12 months and will make agreed payments into your*

account for you¹. You will have a say about how your money is managed and you will be able to start taking money out once you reach the age of 18.

- We will support you to learn to drive where this will help you get into training and the right job.*
- When the time comes for you to leave care we will listen to and act on your views about the services and support you need to help you become an independent adult (including accommodation, further/ higher education, training and employment).*
- We will ensure that when you leave school you will receive an offer of education, employment or training. This will include access to a careers adviser and an information and guidance session.*
- We will provide work experience opportunities and training or apprenticeships to help young people in and leaving care to develop their CV and find employment. This will include young people over the age of 18 and a range of different types of work experience and advice.*

Background (if needed)

Current situation

3.1 A briefing was provided to the Corporate Parenting Panel on 13th January 2009 and a progress report will be provided for 7th April 2009. The information is summarised in the body of this report.

3.2 The Life Chances Forum, chaired by Gail Hancock, Head of Service, Safeguarding and Family Support, has taken on the responsibility for ensuring that the London Pledge is implemented at a local level. This has been on a number of levels.

3.3 The Life Chances Forum has asked that the Virtual Children Looked After Team project manage the implementation with particular reference to:

- Producing a guide for staff as to how every relevant child looked after has his or her own pledge. This will inevitably require a framework as to when, how, and who will provide particular aspects of the pledge
- Identifying how the progress of each pledge can be tracked on Frameworki
- Considering any outstanding financial commitments
- Considering how the pledge may merge with the Care Leavers charter

3.4 We have, by way of the Life Chances Forum, considered how we will meet the financial costs inherent in the pledge. The initial report to Corporate Parenting highlighted an approximation of the cost to implement the pledge and that a grant has been provided by way of Care Matters which will partly meet that cost.

3.5 The Life Chances Forum has agreed that the following costs, which were identified by the previous report to the Corporate Parenting Panel, will be financed by way of grants.

- The cost of ensuring that children looked after receive information about their rights and expectations of the Council, both in hard copy and online.
- Laptops for CLA will be covered by a successful bid for IT monies from the Department of Children, Schools and Families. A manager has been identified to manage this process

3.6 We are awaiting the outcome of the work undertaken by the CLA Virtual Team meeting to decide how we:

- Allocate free leisure passes
- Allocate bicycles and the criteria to use

3.7 We have earmarked the next Life Chances Forum to look at what budget we have to set aside to the finance the above and other “bids”

3.8. We take the view that the London Pledge should not be used as a tick box of what we provide to CLA. Rather, like our own children, the individual pledge will consider with each child/young person what he or she needs now, in the near future and in the distant future. The pledge will be reviewed at each Child Care Review with the expectation that it be amended with the changing circumstances of the child/young person.

Why a change is needed

4.1. Harrow, in line with all other London Authorities, has signed up to the London Pledge. It is, as already indicated, a way of providing a consistent and transparent service to all children looked after.

4.2 Harrow is well placed to meet the demands of the pledge in that it already provides much that is expected of the Local Authority

Main options

5.1. All children looked after will be provided with their own individual pledge which will be reviewed at each Child Care Review

Other options considered

6.1 There is an initial resource impact in that the Virtual Children Looked After Team has been tasked with implementing the Pledge. However, when up and running this will become part of the direct work undertaken with each child looked after

6.2 In terms of the equalities impact the pledge, as already stated, will act to provide a consistent service to all children looked after.

6.3 There are no specific or community safety issues, other than to note that we will need to show that we have effective and relevant pledges for all children looked after.

Financial Implications

7.1 Officers will endeavour to meet the demands of the pledge and as already stated the Life Chances Forum will lead in mapping out what will be required.

7.2. It has been estimated that in order to meet all the demands of the pledge the following outlay will be required, in addition to what has already been funded by way of the Care matters Grant

- 2k for printing
- 32k for leisure and swimming passes
- 8k for bicycles
- **A total of 42k**

7.3. However, the above estimation supposes that every child will be provided with passes and bicycles at the same time. This will not be the case as the needs of children and young people will be different at different times. It is envisaged that a pledge will be developed once a child or young person becomes looked after, together with the Social Worker, which is unique to the child and which may cover agreed periods of time. The pledge is then formally reviewed at the 6 monthly Children Looked After review and a decision is made as to whether it should be changed or amended to reflect any changes in circumstances.

7.4. The process will encompass the following elements:

- The child or young person will be provided with a copy of the London Pledge
- The Social Worker, with the child or young person, and in consultation with the parents, carers and other significant colleagues, will identify which specific areas of the pledge need to be addressed for that period
- For example, the child or young person may be interested in *“the selection of staff working with or for children and young people and the training of new social workers and foster carers.” (Stay Safe)*. The pledge will identify what they are particularly interested in doing, the training they will require, who will be responsible for supporting the child or young person and the timeframe.
- A further example is in relation to the provision of bicycles. The individualised pledge will identify when the child will have a bicycle and the period it will cover. It does not mean that the child or young person will have a bicycle all the time that they are looked after. If the young person has a specific interest it may be that a trade off is made. So, for example, the pledge will state that, rather than a bicycle, the child or young person is helped with fishing equipment.
- The pledge will also identify what is expected of the child or young person to ensure that they benefit positively
- For the older child looked after an agreement will be reached, in consultation with the carers, as to whether and how monies set aside for birthdays and festivals may contribute to the cost
- A similar discussion will take place internally

7.5. The additional cost to the Council will be determined by the individual needs of the relevant Children Looked After and will become clearer as the individual pledges are formulated. The process will begin in the next 2–3 months. The Life Chances Forum will ‘take stock’ of what funds it will have to finance this commitment. It is accepted that this commitment was made in tandem with all other London Local Authorities. Members will be advised and asked for further direction if further funds are required

Section 3 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact:

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Background Papers: None

If appropriate, does the report include the following considerations?

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