

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

7 APRIL 2009

Chairman: * Councillor Janet Mote

Councillors: * Husain Akhtar * Mitzi Green
 * Miss Christine Bednell * Mrs Myra Michael (1)
 * Mrs Margaret Davine

* Denotes Member present
 (1) Denotes category of Reserve Member

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL**PART II - MINUTES**70. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**

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

| <u>Ordinary Member</u> | <u>Reserve Member</u> |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Councillor Eric Silver | Councillor Myra Michael |

71. **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.

72. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2009 be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

73. **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.

74. **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 February 2009. An officer outlined the following key points and issues:

- the Council's target for Adoptions and Special Guardianship Orders had been exceeded;
- core assessment performance had fallen and it was unlikely that the Council would meet its target for the year. However, action was being taken to address the issue and officers were confident that the 3 year Local Area Agreement (LAA) target would still be met. It was felt that a number of factors had resulted in less assessments being processed, the two most significant being an increased number of referrals and the tightening of regulations in relation to the way in which assessments were conducted;
- there were some concerns surrounding the number of Looked After Children missing 25 or more days of school, with the Council's threshold of 10% having already been exceeded. One of the main contributing factors had been the difficulty in finding school places for new unaccompanied asylum seeking children. An action plan had since been drawn up to tackle the problem.

In response to questions from Panel Members, officers clarified that:

- in regards to the reduction in core assessment performance, changes in legislation had resulted in an increased number of referrals which in turn had created additional work for officers. Fortunately, staffing within Childrens Services had remained relatively stable, with a core group of permanent and experienced staff ensuring continuity within the department;

- the services of Welfare Call were currently employed to monitor unauthorised absence from school and an internal Welfare Officer had recently been assigned to oversee, monitor and increase the attendance levels of all Looked After Children. At the request of Members, it was agreed that a breakdown of the current attendance statistics would be provided.

A Member of the Panel stated that whilst the use of a Welfare Officer was a positive step towards tackling absenteeism, a single officer monitoring all Looked After Children within the borough was unlikely to be able to intervene until the problem had reached an advanced stage. An officer explained that the Welfare Officer was not expected to operate in isolation and that much of the responsibility still rested with individual teachers, Virtual Headteachers and Welfare Call. However, the Welfare Officer would be able to monitor the situation as a whole, identify areas of concern and take action when necessary.

In relation to core assessment performance, a Member requested that the Panel be provided with an update outlining how the core assessment process had changed. An officer stated that he would aim to provide a written report at the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

The Chairman congratulated Children's Services on achieving its Adoptions and Special Guardianship Orders target. She stated that the success clearly demonstrated that Harrow's joint partnership with Coram, which had initially been considered highly unconventional, had in fact worked, with other Councils now looking to follow Harrow's example.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

75. **INFORMATION REPORT - Update on the development of the "Children in Care Council" in line with the London Pledge:**

The Panel received an information report of the Corporate Director of Children's Services which outlined the progress made towards developing a 'Children in Care Council', which would support the Corporate Parenting Panel in their deliberations, in line with the London Pledge.

An officer informed the Panel that the Young Voices group had been re-launched in November 2008 and its members were hoping to develop it into a Children in Care Council. The officer explained that this group currently comprised of a diverse group of young people and its purpose was to give individuals within the care system both a voice and valuable life skills.

In order to ensure the proposed Children in Care Council would function efficiently, members of the Young Voices group had recently undertaken training to improve their ability to hold meetings, communicate clearly and make decisions. Further training was due to be organised with the assistance of A National Voice. In addition, the Panel were informed that Wandsworth Council currently operated a Children in Care Council and that the Young Voices group intended to meet with its members to share ideas and good practice.

Following questions from Panel Members, the officer clarified that:

- following further training, it was intended that members of the Young Voices group would have the opportunity to sit on fostering interview panels;
- there was no limit to the number of young people that could join the group. It was felt that attracting new members would have a positive impact on the work of the group by promoting diversity and encouraging new ideas;
- the group would decide whether they wished to promote a formal hierarchical structure or continue with the current arrangement in which all group members were equal;
- the work of the Young Voices group and the proposed Children in Care Council would link closely with issues addressed in the London Pledge. Whilst there were currently no formal links to individual schools, it was hoped that the knowledge and experience members would gain could be transferred into other areas such as school councils.

The Chairman stated that she wished to encourage the Young Voices group to maintain formal communications with the Corporate Parenting Panel. The officer stated that this would be beneficial to both parties, but that the meetings and discussions would need to be managed carefully to ensure they did not simply become

a formality or routine. An officer added that the terms of reference of the Corporate Parenting Panel might need to be reviewed to ensure that the links between it and the Young Voices group / Children in Care Council were firmly established.

A number of Members requested that they be reissued with a copy of the London Pledge. In response, an officer undertook to provide this document.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

76. **INFORMATION REPORT - Progress on the implementation of the 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 to the same range of key services.

An officer outlined the following key points:

- the London Pledge had been signed off on behalf of Harrow Council at a London wide launch on 25 November 2008;
- the Life Chances Forum would be ensuring that the London Pledge was successfully implemented at a local level;
- individual children would receive tailored pledges to ensure they received the items or services that best suited their needs. Individual Looked After Children would not be entitled to everything that was available under the pledge and officers stressed that provision was based on need;
- the way in which the London Pledge would be financed had been considered by the Life Chances Forum. However, though the Care Matters grant was expected to cover much of the cost, due to the flexibility of the pledge and the use of individual pledges for different children, it was not possible to calculate with absolute certainty the cost of full implementation;
- the cost of information technology equipment for Looked After Children would be met by a grant from the Department of Children, Schools and Families. An officer had been appointed to oversee the process.

The officer stated that, over the following two months, Social Workers in Harrow would begin to introduce the London Pledge to both carers and Looked After Children. The Council would monitor the process and provide the Corporate Parenting Panel with frequent updates.

The Chairman stated that whilst the concept of the London Pledge seemed promising, financing it could be problematic. A Member of the Panel stated that the issues in relation to financing were foreseen, but that it was felt the Council had a duty to proceed with its implementation. Another Member stated that, provided individual pledges were sensible, financing the scheme should not be too problematic. An officer added that the implementation of the London Pledge would be carefully monitored to ensure that it was operating as expected.

An officer stated that it was important that Looked After Children placed into care outside of the borough had access to the same information and resources as those based in Harrow. The officer indicated that the use of a blog was being considered in order to centralise information and allow individual children to share their experiences of the scheme.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

77. **INFORMATION REPORT - Adoption Services provided by Harrow Council Children's Services:**

The Panel received an information report of the Corporate Director of Children's Services which outlined the Adoption Services provided by Harrow Council. An officer highlighted the key points detailed in the report and invited questions from the Panel.

A Member requested that the Panel be provided with a copy of the booklet that was given to individuals that had adopted a child. The officer stated that the training and support material was provided by Corum, but that he would ensure that Panel Members were provided with the documents.

The Chairman stated that she was pleased to see that the use of Life Story Books had become commonplace. She and other Panel Members stated that the books greatly assisted those that had entered the care system at a young age, allowing them to both understand their past and develop an identity for the future.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

78. **Any Other Urgent Business:**

Submission of agenda items

The Chairman requested that any Member that wished to have an item placed on the agenda at a future meeting contact her in order to make the necessary arrangements.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 6.05 pm, closed at 7.20 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JANET MOTE
Chairman

Appendix 1

**Officers in
attendance:**

Andreas Kyriacou

Senior Co-ordinator, Children
Looked After

Peter Tolley

Family Placement Service Manager

Adeline Abraham

Youth Participation Officer

Appendix 2

**Councillors
backbenching:**

Councillor Paul Osborn