

REPORT FOR: Corporate Parenting
Panel

Date: 12th January 2010

Subject: "Care Matters" Up-date Report

Key Decision: No

Responsible Officer: Paul Clark, Corporate Director
Children's Services

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Christine Bednell, Portfolio
Holder for Children's Services

Exempt: No

Decision subject to
Call-in: No

Enclosures: None

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

Summary:

This report sets out the up-dated position regarding the progress of the "Care Matters" agenda in Children's Services which aims to improve life chances and outcomes for children looked after.

Recommendations:

The Panel is asked to consider the detail of the up-date report, provide appropriate feed back and challenge about progress to date and consider future priorities and arrangements, particularly in respect of funding for 2011 and beyond.

Reason:

The current Corporate and statutory responsibilities identify children looked after as a priority group within our local community. In order to tackle the inequalities between CLA and their peers, targeted initiatives, particularly in relation to education and health inequalities, will remain a key focus for the future care of CLA.

Section 2 – Report

Background

The “Care Matters” (2007) agenda aimed to improve life chances and outcomes for CLA by tackling inequalities, especially in relation to education and health. Locally the “Care Matters” programme that was introduced in 2008 – 2009 focussed primarily, but not exclusively, on educational attainment and achievement. The programme has been overseen by the multi-agency CLA Life Chances Forum which has taken operational responsibility for leading and developing a range of initiatives.

Current situation

The current situation remains in line with the original “Care Matters” plan proposed by the CLA Life Chances Forum and agreed with the Corporate Parenting Panel in 2008 - 2009. The up-dated details are as follows;

Personal Education Plan Co-ordinator

A permanent full time PEP Co-ordinator is in post and the salary is fully met by “Care Matters” funding. The PEP Co-ordinator plays a pivotal role in establishing consistently good practice in relation to the chairing and co-ordination of initial PEPs and the quality assurance of on-going PEP arrangements.

As of September 2009 at the start of the new 2009 – 2010 academic year, there were 76 CLA of statutory school age. Of these 76 CLA there were 23 CLA with Statements of Special Educational Need. In addition, 62 CLA of statutory school age were placed with foster carers and eligible for a Personal Education Allowance.

To date the PEP Co-ordinator has:

- Chaired initial PEP meetings for CLA
- Established a system for monitoring and tracking the progress and review of PEPs

- Published a revised PEP guide
- Established an integrated process for allocating Personal Education Allowances (PEAs) as an outcome of an initial or review PEP for eligible CLA
- Developed a Pre-School PEP in consultation with Early Years, Education Psychology and a Virtual Head Teacher which will be launched in a paper version from 5th January 2010 and in an electronic version by 18th February 2010
- Adopted the Pan-London PEP following consultation with other London Local Authorities which is due for launch in an electronic format on 21st December 2009
- Consulted with other Local Authorities about adopting a Pan London PEP scorecard which is going to be launched as part of a pilot in Harrow on 16th December 2009
- Attended Virtual Head Teacher meetings

Children Looked After Education Welfare Officer

A permanent term time only CLA EWO is in post and the salary is fully met by the “Care Matters” funding. The CLA EWO plays a pivotal role in maintaining a detailed overview of any CLA who is missing school and has undertaken individual case work with CLA who have missed, or have been at risk of missing, 25+ days of school.

In October 2009 there was a total of 86 CLA of statutory school age. Of these 46 CLA attend schools in Harrow and 40 CLA attend schools in other Local Authorities. There is a total of 18 CLA whose attendance has been/is below 90% and they have received input from the CLA EWO. 5 of the 46 CLA attending Harrow schools had attendance below 90% and 13 of the 40 CLA attending schools in other Local Authorities had attendance below 90%. The majority of the CLA with attendance below 90% in this cohort, which is 14 of the 18, are in Years 9, 10 & 11.

Some of the current challenges impacting on this area of performance include CLA (including CLA with disabilities) that have missed school due to ill health, fixed term exclusions and placement break downs due to challenging behaviour.

“Welfare Call”

“Welfare Call” continues to be commissioned by the Education Welfare Service to monitor and report the daily attendance of all CLA whether they are attending schools in Harrow or elsewhere. This is an essential service to ensure accurate and up-to date tracking of all CLA of statutory school age and assists with the casework planning for all CLA who have missed, or at risk of missing 25 days or more education. “Care Matters” funding is used to commission “Welfare Call” to undertake this work each academic year.

Virtual Head Teachers

Three part time VHT’s continue to be employed to champion and promote the educational needs and aspirations of children looked after. The VHT’s support and promote the “Care Matters” initiatives with other Head Teachers and

Designated CLA Teachers. "Care Matters" funding contributes to the costs associated with the back fill arrangements for these Head Teachers.

Appropriate models for managing and developing a CLA Virtual School focussing on activity and performance data, have been explored. A decision has now been taken to provide remote access for VHT's to access the Framework-i electronic social care record which has the technical capacity to be developed and extended for this purpose. VHT's are being trained to navigate the system and it is anticipated that the VHT's will have remote access by January 2010. "Care Matters" funding has met the costs of setting up each VHT with remote access facilities.

In response to new statutory guidance for CLA Designated Teachers a CLA Designated Teacher Forum event is being planned for February 2010 with a proposal to establish regular on-going sessions. A group of professionals, including the VHT's and the PEP Co-ordinator, will be working together to host this event in order to raise awareness about the statutory requirements and develop local expertise.

Higher Education Allowances

HE Allowances have been paid to 11 care leavers in 2008 – 2009 and 4 care leavers in 2009 – 10. This is a one off payment of £2,000, as recommended by the DCSF, to support care leavers pursuing higher education.

Personal Education Allowances

PEAs, at an introductory rate of £200 per CLA of statutory school age placed with a foster carer, were provided to all eligible CLA in 2008 – 2009. In 2009 – 2010 the PEA application is determined through the PEP process and allocations of PEAs, at a rate of up to £500 (DCSF recommended rate) per CLA of statutory school age placed with a foster carer, are processed via the existing placement payment arrangements set up by the Placement Service.

The PEA is meant to be in addition to any other payment or resource that would ordinarily be made available to CLA and is designed to target and enhance learning opportunities and arrangements to improve educational outcomes for CLA.

"Letterbox" literacy & numeracy scheme

One of the VHT's has led on the implementation and co-ordination of the "Letterbox" scheme which targets younger CLA in Years 3 – 6. The scheme ran for the first time during the latter part of the 2008 – 2009 academic year and during the 2009 summer vacation period. The scheme will be repeated in the latter part of 2009 – 2010 academic year and during the 2010 summer vacation. The scheme allows for age and developmentally appropriate books and educational games and materials to be sent through the post to individual CLA. The scheme encourages CLA, with the support of their carers, to undertake home based learning that is interesting and fun. The VHT met with the Harrow Foster Care Association to advise foster carers about the benefits of the scheme for CLA. The VHT is evaluating the impact and outcome of the

previous scheme with individual CLA, their carers and teachers in preparation for the roll out of the scheme next year.

Harrow – HAVS Independent Visitor Partnership

A part time IV Co-ordinator, employed by HAVS, is in post. The partnership aims to identify suitable independent visitors for CLA, especially those that have little or no contact with their birth families and are unlikely to be returned to the care of their birth parents.

To date the IV Co-ordinator has:

- Researched other comparable IV Schemes
- Set up and established on-going publicity about the local IV Scheme
- Established clear referral & communication systems with children's social care which are supported by electronic systems using FWi
- Agreed operational standards and day to day arrangements
- Received 17 IV enquiries & pursued 15
- Successfully recruited, inducted and trained 13 IVs
- Matched 5 IV's with CLA (of these 5 - 1 is male & 4 are females, 2 are White UK, 2 are Somali & 1 Black African-Caribbean)
- A further 5 enquiries to follow up in 2010

The IV induction and training programme includes 6 mandatory sessions covering the IV role, policies and procedures, safeguarding, equality & anti-discriminatory practice, a group panel process and administrative support functions. The IV role session includes coverage of the 5 "Every Child Matters" outcomes and a focus on CLA educational opportunities and outcomes.

1:1 Tuition

As part of the Narrowing the Gap agenda CLA have been identified as a target group. All schools are expected to provide 1:1 tutors for CLA and an activity report has been requested in order to monitor and review this activity. The PEP Co-ordinator is able to discuss opportunities for 1:1 tuition as part of the PEP process with schools and consider whether any additional funding may be required via the PEA.

"Chance to Shine" Homework Club

The re-launch of this club for CLA and foster carer's birth children was unsuccessful in April 2009. Further consultation is on-going with the Harrow Foster Care Association to clarify plans for re-launching a viable homework club in 2010. An appropriately resourced venue and tutors have been identified for this purpose.

Achievement Awards

The PEP Co-ordinator and CLA EWO co-ordinated Youth Achievement Award Ceremony nominations for CLA in respect of educational attainment and achievement. Eight nominations were made and 2 CLA were short listed for

the YAA ceremony held on 18th November 2009, one for achieving 10 GCSE's and the other for improving school attendance and attitude to learning.

In addition to the above a financial award of £50 per GCSE is being given to all CLA who achieved a GCSE. "Care Matters" funding supports these payments.

There are no proposed changes to the original plan at this stage.

Financial Implications

The various initiatives detailed in the report are being funded from the 2009/10 Care Matters budget of £127,578. Based on the spend to date and the projected forecast it is expected that the projects will be delivered within this budget.

The £127,578 funding is equal to the 2008/09 allocation of Care Matters Area Based Grant (ABG). Since the Care Matters Grant was subsumed into the Area Based Grant this funding is no longer a ring fenced grant but forms part of the council base budget. Since 2008/09 any increases in the ABG are not passported onto the service.

It is anticipated that the ABG funding allocation will be extended from 2011 and beyond to ensure that targeted "Care Matters" initiatives for children looked after will be maintained and developed in the future. If this was not to be the case the Medium Term Budget Strategy in 2010 – 2011 would need to address the shortfall in provision for April 2011 onwards. Without continuation of the current funding levels the existing "Care Matters" initiatives will be threatened.

The wider resource implications relate specifically to the employment of staff and the delivery of direct services to CLA. There are a number of staff salaries that are dependent on the "Care Matters" funding, namely the CLA Education Welfare Officer, PEP Co-ordinator, Virtual Head Teachers and Independent Visitor Partnership Co-ordinator. The CLA EWO and PEP Co-ordinator are appointed on permanent Council employment contracts funded wholly by the ABG. The ABG also provides backfill for three Head Teachers to fulfil the role of the Virtual Head Teacher. A lump sum payment to HAVS enables them to employ the Independent Visitor Partnership Co-ordinator to run the IV partnership.

Risk Management Implications

Risk included on Directorate risk register? Yes

The Children's Services directorate risk register identifies children in need, including those in need of protection and children looked after, as the key user group in most need of targeted and specialist social care services.

Separate risk register in place? No

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Emma Stabler	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Chief Financial Officer
Date: 11.12.09.		
Name: Linda Cohen	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Monitoring Officer
Date: 10.12.09.		

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact:

Gail Hancock, Head of Service, Safeguarding, Family Placement & Support.
Telephone contact details
0208 863 5544

Background Papers:

None

If appropriate, does the report include the following considerations?

1.	Consultation	NO
2.	Corporate Priorities	YES
	Harrow Council has a Corporate Parenting responsibility for children looked after. Harrow Council's corporate priorities explicitly aim to improve support to vulnerable people and this includes children looked after.	