

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES

12 JULY 2011

Chairman: * Councillor Mitzi Green

Councillors: * Christine Bednell * John Nickolay (1)
* Margaret Davine * Lynda Seymour
* Brian Gate

* Denotes Member present
(1) Denote category of Reserve Members
† Denotes apologies received

35. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note the attendance of the following duly constituted Reserve Member:

Ordinary Member

Reserve Member

Councillor Janet Mote

Councillor John Nickolay

36. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: That the following declarations were declared:

8: INFORMATION REPORT - Activity and Performance; 9. INFORMATION REPORT - Supporting Young People and Transition to Leaving Care; 10. INFORMATION REPORT - Supporting Unaccompanied Children and Young People Seeking Asylum in Harrow

Councillor Lynda Seymour declared personal interests in the above items in that she was a Children's Centre Worker in the London Borough of Barnet. She would remain in the room during the discussions and decision making on these items.

37. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 March 2011, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

38. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

In accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, the following item was admitted late to the meeting to allow a Vice-Chairman to be appointed to the Corporate Parenting Panel for the 2011/12 Municipal Year at the earliest possible opportunity.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Christine Bednell be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel for the 2011/12 Municipal Year.

39. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put, or petitions or deputations received at this meeting.

RESOLVED ITEMS

40. INFORMATION REPORT - Activity and Performance

An officer introduced a report which set out key data relating to Children Looked After (CLA) and Children with Children with Child Protection Plans (CPP). The report also included outcomes of looked after children aged between sixteen and nineteen. She advised that:

- there were no significant changes in activity for data statistics since the beginning of the 2011/12 financial year, with positive progress being made with initial assessments;
- the 2011 G.C.S.E results for CLA would be presented to the next meeting of the Panel on 3 October 2011.

In response to questions, officers advised that:

- research had been undertaken to enable a better understanding of the educational trends relating to ethnicity. It was essential to accurately interpret this data successfully. The general population of the whole cohort would be examined to identify exactly how diverse the ethnicity of the group was;
- the retention of more in-house foster carers was a deliberate and targeted strategy to become less reliant on agency staff. This drive had also been observed nationally, as recruiting and retaining local foster carers helped build stronger professional relationships and was better value for money;

- the correlation between stress through unemployment, income deprivation and domestic violence was well evidenced. Projections showed that such challenges would have an impact on the borough as a whole and not just those with families;
- it was a statutory responsibility to look after children that had been abandoned. The allocation of responsibility was determined by their home address;
- suitable accommodation was dependant on the assessment of each individual's housing need. Some may need additional support which would require accommodation suitable for shared or supported living. Independent living was strongly encouraged, however hostels could be considered.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

41. INFORMATION REPORT - Supporting Young People and Transition to Leaving Care

An officer introduced a report which updated the Panel on the work being undertaken to support Children Looked After (CLA) and their transition to Leaving Care Services. She advised that:

- excellent progress had been made under the Teenage Placement Strategy (TPS), with the new operating model for Children's Services proposing a single service to deliver the provisions for Children Looked After in Harrow;
- statutory requirements under the Leaving Care and Children's Acts formed the basis for the change of use of the Honeypot Lane Residential Unit into a Semi-Independent Unit. Life skills training and support during the transition to semi-independent living would be offered to individuals until the age of twenty five, if required.

In response to questions, officers advised that:

- the semi independent unit could cater for a maximum of seven young people, providing twenty-four hours support;
- following an unannounced visit in July 2011, the unit retained it's 'Good' status in an Ofsted review;
- the length of time spent at the unit would depend on the individual plan for each young person;
- other semi-independent placement options were available within the borough. Following a review of semi-independent providers, a list of preferred providers was compiled to establish the highest standard and to identify which would be best to utilise;

- in addition to the support provided to its residents, the unit now offered an out-reach service to young people that might be experiencing difficulties at home;
- the possibility of bringing in additional agencies, such as those relating to health and the police to create a wrap-around service outside of social care, was being considered.

Members congratulated officers and staff at the Honey-pot Semi-Independent Unit on retaining its 'Good' status in the recent Ofsted inspection.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

42. INFORMATION REPORT - Supporting Unaccompanied Children and Young People Seeking Asylum in Harrow

An officer introduced a report which updated the Panel on the work undertaken to support unaccompanied children seeking asylum in the UK and their transition to Leaving Care Services. He advised that:

- the strategic approach of the service was devised under the Children's Act to provide children with education, skills training and employment opportunities;
- the views expressed by the children were paramount to learning what the children needed and to adjust the service accordingly;
- assistance was also provided to help these children with their reasons for fleeing, which could include torture, war and escaping conflict;
- approximately 65% of children remained in the UK, with the rest being returned home. Officers were heavily engaged with the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) to encourage and promote two-way learning;
- performance in relation to education was particularly good, with 95% of asylum seeking children being in full time education.

In response to questions, officers advised that:

- 32 out of 149 CLA were asylum seeking children;
- children arrived without any adult supervision. Methods of entry varied from ferry ports to Eurostar. Most appeared to be very resilient without any signs of any psychological trauma, however it often proved difficult to ascertain the extent of the damage their journey had caused;
- the two ultimate outcomes for asylum seeking children were to integrate into society or to return home. Once the children turned eighteen, the UKBA would intervene to determine their right to stay in the UK;
- potential links to the community sector had been explored;

- it was anticipated that children would be excluded from the Government drive to reduce immigration;
- the London Borough of Croydon oversaw a Pan-London rota of London Boroughs accepting Asylum Seeking Children, and would refer the children to the correct Borough when they arrived. It was not uncommon for children to be brought to the service. Officers had worked with the Serious Crime Team regarding exploitation and child trafficking;
- most children arrived into the country not knowing where they were. Some children came from war torn countries where survival was more important than education;
- training for Members on asylum seeking children was being proposed to keep them informed on the operational aspect of the service.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

43. Further Announcements

An officer advised that to enable those from Beyond Limits to contribute more effectively, it was intended for future reports on their activities to be presented to the Panel on a regular basis.

RESOLVED: That the item be noted.

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

(Signed) COUNCILLOR MITZI GREEN
Chairman