

Minutes

EDUCATION & CHILDREN'S SERVICES POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

20 March 2012

Meeting held at Committee Room 5 - Civic Centre,
High Street, Uxbridge UB8 1UW



	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors Catherine Dann (Chairman) Judith Cooper (Vice-Chairman) David Benson Lindsay Bliss Peter Curling John Hensley Susan O'Brien John Riley</p> <p>Witnesses Present: David Fry – Service Manager - Children's Resources, Three Adoptive parents Uma Sharma – Adoption Panel Chairman Stefan Szulc – Adoption Panel Legal Adviser</p> <p>LBH Officers Present: Linda Sanders, Corporate Director – Social Care, Health & Housing, Merlin Joseph – Deputy Director, Children & Families, Anna Crispin - Chief Education Officer, Gill Brice – Democratic Services, Raj Alagh – Borough Solicitor</p>	
72.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>There were no apologies for absence</p>	
73.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING. (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>Councillor Judith Cooper declared a personal interest on Item 7 – Review on Adoption & Permanence for Looked After Children and remained in the meeting to discuss the item.</p> <p>Councillor John Hensley declared a personal interest in Item 7 – Review on Adoption & Permanence for Looked After Children and remained in the meeting to discuss the item.</p>	
74.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT ALL ITEMS MARKED PART 1 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND ALL PART 2 ITEMS WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>It was confirmed that all items were in Part 1 and would be heard in public.</p>	

75.	<p>MATTERS THAT HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED IN ADVANCE OR URGENT (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>There had been no items notified in advance of urgent.</p>	
76.	<p>TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING. (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2012 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.</p>	<p>Action by</p> <p><i>Gill Brice</i></p>
77.	<p>FINAL REPORT - ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION (<i>Agenda Item 6</i>)</p>	<p>Action by</p>
	<p>The Borough Solicitor attended the meeting to assist the committee in their consideration of the draft Elective Home Education (EHE) policy.</p> <p>The Borough Solicitor emphasised that it was the parents who provide home education and the Council undertakes safeguarding duties. The Local Authority needed to ensure that the advice provided in the policy was lawful.</p> <p>The Children Act, sections 10 & 11 provided the legislative framework for developing children's services, section 10 sets out a statutory framework for cooperation arrangements to be made by the local authorities with a view to improving the well-being of children in there area whilst section 11 sets out the arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. However, this section does not place any additional duties or responsibilities on local authorities over and above section 175[1] of the Education Act 2002</p> <p>Sections 17 & 14 of the Children Act 1989 set out the principle provisions that governed safeguarding duties. This does not give the Council the power to routinely see a home educated child on an annual basis. If there were any concerns about a child's safety/welfare these and would be treated in the same way as any other case.</p> <p>The committee was informed that the policy complied with the statutory framework and the 2007 guidelines. A few anomalies had been found in the proposed draft policy and recommended adaptations had been circulated to the committee members. The law in relation to EHE was extremely grey and had not been clarified since 2007 and no other guidance produced since that time.</p> <p>The Borough Solicitor advised the committee that some parents that home educate felt that the Local Authority had a suspicious view of this choice and that the policy did not strike the right balance between home education and safeguarding. The powers of intervention only came in to play if a Local Authority felt that a child was not being suitably educated. The point that needed to be made was that the policy needed to be robust and also strike the right balance.</p> <p>The Borough Solicitor then took the committee through the changes that he was suggesting be made to the policy.</p>	<p><i>Gill Brice</i> <i>Deborah Bell</i></p>

	<p>The committee thanked the Borough Solicitor for all the work he had undertaken on the policy.</p> <p>A member suggested that Recommendation 4 be changed to include 'in consultation with interested parties'.</p> <p>The committee felt that as the report already included the necessary degree of consultation it was felt that there was no need for an additional recommendation to be added.</p> <p>Resolved – That the Committee</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agreed the recommendations contained in the final report. 2. Endorsed the policy, which was to be amended in accordance with the advice of the Borough Solicitor. 3. Noted that the Chairman, in liaison with Democratic Services, would make any minor amendments as required to the report prior to it's submission to Cabinet. 	
78.	<p>SECOND REVIEW - ADOPTION AND PERMANENCY (<i>Agenda Item 7</i>)</p>	<p>Action by</p>
	<p>Officers introduced the report and informed the committee that the witnesses would focus on the Adoption Panel processes, what the adopters experience had been of adopting with Hillingdon and what the process had been like for them.</p> <p>The Chairman of the Adoption Panel advised the committee that the adoption initiatives were set out in the Children's Act 2002 and Adoption Law.</p> <p>Adoption Panel Chairman and Legal Adviser made the following points:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was a central list of Adoption Panel members to ensure there was no delay in considering permanency for a child. • There were national minimum standards in relation to timescales for Adoption. • A child's wishes and the views of the birth parents had to be considered. • Birth family had to be considered as an option for permanency, if this was felt to be in the best interest of a child. • Black children are often older when placed for adoption so there needs became greater. • For every year a child waits for a permanent placement the chance of permanency decreased by 20%. <p>The remit of the Panel was to consider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanency through various routes including Adoption, Long Term Fostering or Special Guardianship Orders. 	<p><i>Gill Brice</i></p>

- Contact Orders for a child post placement.
- Placement orders.
- Authority to place a child for adoption It was unclear whether this would continue under the Government review recommendations. .
- Prospective Adopters - number of children, age range, and sex of child
- Post placement resources if necessary to provide post adoption support.

Further information provided for the review.

- Feedback showed that 77% of cases were either good or excellent.
- 14% of cases were delayed by Court proceedings and 9% delayed for other reasons, but this had now improved.
- There were 16 children awaiting adoption, 9 adoptions approved this year, 20 children placed with adopters, 8 children had waited longer than the required 12 months. These figures included hard to place children due to their age and those with additional needs.
- Currently the adoption process was taking about 55 week approval of adopters was taking 8 months from their application being submitted to being presented to panel for approval as adopters.
- Prospective Adopters had access to the Adoption Panels medical adviser to obtain information on the needs of a child.
- Early intervention was critical for some families otherwise the same process would be required for any additional children they had.
- There was a need for post adoption support to be provided to ensure placements do not break down.
- There may be therapeutic work required before a placement was made.
- Timescales needed to reflect the needs of children and whether further research and counselling was required.
- Delay was necessary in some cases to allow issues to be resolved and safeguarding for a child and adopters.

Challenges that may arise from the Government Review

- The placement of sibling groups may require additional time to provide permanency.
- The reduced timescale of 6 months for adoption would put pressure on Local Authority's to meet the deadlines.
- There needed to be a quality of service provided for children and prospective adopters.

Information provided by the First Adopter

- From the first enquiry to being approved as adopters had taken a year.
- Once approved as adopters it was a year before a child was placed.

- The home assessment was carried out by the same Social Worker throughout, which had helped.
- Two Hillingdon children were placed who had previously been in care for 2 years.
- Both children needed a lot of therapy with the older child now placed in a special school and doing well.
- Both children still had emotional needs and would need further therapy in the future.
- Support had been received from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for 3 years but had now ceased.
- The younger child was in main stream school but was not coping well.
- Social Services were very supportive of the family, where other professionals were not providing any request for support.
- Funding was felt to be an issue and this may have been why support was not being provided by other professionals.
- The children adopted do not have any direct contact with their birth family.
- It was difficult to say if a longer lead in time for the placement would have helped.

Information provided by the 2nd Adopter

- The assessment was smooth and the Social Worker was very good.
- Matching had taken a long time for various reasons.
- The children placed had been with their birth family for 5 years and in Foster Care for 18 months.
- A lot of support had been provided by the Hillingdon Play Therapist.
- All other professionals other than Social Services had not providing the support the family felt they needed.
- Access to school placements should be a priority for children being adopted.
- Information about the children was not forthcoming from the foster carer.
- There were a lot less issues where a child had not been relinquished early from their birth family.

Officers advised the committee that there had been a change to the admission policy and children placed for adoption would now be placed first on the waiting list for schools.

Information provided by the Third Adopter

- Started process in 2010, had found obstacles as a same sex couple in dealing with other Agency's.
- The Hillingdon process had run smoothly from start to finish.
- Had attended a 3 day training course in December 2010.
- Placement and panel reports were provided.
- Social Services had provided as much case history on the child as they had.
- Play therapy was also provided for the child.

- The pre-adoption support provided foster carer was 100% positive.
- Support had been provided by Hillingdon Social Services throughout the process.
- Were approved as adopters in May 2011 and a placement was made in January 2012 before the child's first birthday.
- Had nothing but praise for Hillingdon in making the placement prior to the child's first birthday.
- The child was placed in care when 8 days old so had not been subjected to their birth family environment.
- The timescales had been appropriate as it had given time to think about the challenges.
- The learning process was continuous throughout the adoption process.
- There had been a great relationship with Hillingdon Social Services.
- Support had always been provided when requested.
- There was nothing that Hillingdon could learn from other boroughs.

During discussion, the following points were raised

- Concerns at the proposed timescales of 6 months as some cases would be more difficult than others in relation to contested adoptions.
- Parallel planning for a child was carried out where it was considered appropriate.
- 50% of children awaiting adoption needed support, Hillingdon had an in house play therapist and this was provided pre and post adoption.
- Specialist support was bought in when required
- Research showed that the age of a child and the needs of a child were factors in the breakdown of adoption placements.
- Provision of support for adopters was no different to that provided for Foster Carers. Support was provided for adopters' long term if required.
- The Government review recognised the need for consistent adoption support; this was to be provided by an adoption support passport. This strand of work would need to be developed.
- The aim would to improve the concurrent placement with foster cares who then become the adopter.
- It was unclear if there would be any resources available for post adoption support being suggested by the Government review.
- It was suggested that a recommendation could be to see how the adoption system could be streamlined.
- Further details were to be provided by the Government in the Summer on how the new guidelines would work.
- There was not a skill shortage in counselling, CAHMS was the first point of contact for counselling and there may be issues around funding.
- How can it be ensured that adopters were realistic about all a child's needs?

- The Local Authority only provided funding for assessments for a child.
- Residential assessments were rarely provided but may be provided where a young parent was involved.
- Prospective adopters were given an indication of a child's needs as it was not really known how a child would react in a family environment.
- Awareness of the needs and potential needs could be talked through with the adoption panel's medical adviser.
- The aim was for permanency for a child, some children may have long term needs and many settle and catch up.
- There needed to be 2 strands to adoption, which would require two different mechanisms.
- Residence Orders were just as permanent as Adoption Orders & Special Guardianship Orders, which the Courts had power to grant.
- Research showed that adoption outcomes were better for a child.
- There needed to be strong permanency planning
- The report should include all the costs in relation to different permanency plans.
- Consideration should be given to how the Adoption medical adviser could be factored into the support plan.
- Further research was needed into how the post adoption support could be developed.
- The report should make reference to Voluntary Agency's and how they had the ability to bring forward some placements.
- Adoption support was reviewed every 3 years after this it was provided by the Authority where a child lived.
- Adoption support was provided until the age of 18.
- Look at support for adopters in conjunction with other partners.
- The timescale for permanency planning in some areas could be improved with decisions on children made early
- Were there was a case history to act quicker before behaviour manifests.
- An inspection of Adoption in Hillingdon was carried out in February; Hillingdon met timescales but was not judged as outstanding.
- A report be bought back to a future meeting of the POC on adoption performance

The Chairman thanked officers and the witnesses for attending the meeting and providing information for the review. Officers were asked to feedback the positive comments made by the adopters.

Suggested recommendations

- Develop a score card for Hillingdon as soon as practicably possible.
- To ensure correct information was provided and that adopters were prepared as much as possible for adoption.

	<p>Resolved</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the information provided as part of the witness session be used to form part of the evidence of the review. 2. That officers be asked to submit a draft of the final report of the review, with suggested possible recommendations, to the next meeting of the Committee. 	
79.	<p>FORWARD PLAN 2011/2012 (<i>Agenda Item 8</i>)</p> <p>The committee received a report setting out the items on the Forward Plan relating to Education & Children's Services.</p> <p>The committee asked to be provided with an update on the current situation in relation to school places and school expansion programme.</p> <p>Officers advised that 12 forms of entry would be required for September 2012 but not all would be permanent. The last admission into reception classes had not been offered their first choice. There had also been 2,500 in year applicants across the school age range. A third were from other countries, a third hard to place children and internal moves and a third were from other boroughs.</p> <p>An update on the school places would be provided at the next meeting.</p> <p>Resolved – That the items on the Forward Plan be noted and an update on school places update would be provided at the next meeting.</p>	<p>Action by</p> <p><i>Gill Brice</i></p>
80.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME 2011/2012 (<i>Agenda Item 9</i>)</p> <p>The committee received a report setting out the Work Programme for 2011/2012.</p> <p>Resolved – That report be noted.</p>	<p>Action by</p> <p><i>Gill Brice</i></p>
	<p>The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 10.00 pm.</p>	

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Gill Brice on 01895 250693. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.