

Minutes

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND LEARNING POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

26 June 2013

Meeting held at Committee Room 3a - Civic
Centre, High Street, Uxbridge UB8 1UW



	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors John Riley (Chairman), David Benson, Brian Crowe, Jazz Dhillon (Labour Lead), Janet Gardner (In place of Lindsay Bliss), Dominic Gilham and John Hensley</p> <p>Also Present: Ann Holmes (Service Manager, Children in Care), Keith Ivey (Foster Carer), Tedros Tzegai (Foster Carer), Stephen White (Registered Manager, Hillingdon Children's Resource Centre) and David Fry (Service Manager, Children's Resources)</p> <p>LBH Officers Present: Angela Harris (Residential / Placements Manager), Merlin Joseph (Director of Children & Young People's Services), Julien Kramer (Interim Chief Education Officer), Steven Maiden (Democratic Services Officer) and Meng Pocock (Corporate Parenting Manager)</p>
11.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies were received from Councillors Bliss and Cooper with Councillor Gardner substituting for Councillor Bliss.</p>
12.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THE MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>Councillor John Riley declared a non-pecuniary interest as he was a Governor of Field End Infant School. He remained in the room during the meeting and took part in the discussions.</p> <p>Councillor Dominic Gilham declared a non-pecuniary interest as he was a Governor at Pinkwell Primary School and Hillingdon Primary School. He remained in the room during the meeting and took part in the discussions.</p> <p>Councillor David Benson declared a non-pecuniary interest as he was a Governor of Uxbridge High School and lectured at further and higher education colleges. He remained in the room during the meeting and took part in the discussions.</p> <p>Tony Little declared a non-pecuniary interest as he was a Governor at Pinkwell Primary School and Harlington Community School. He remained in the room during the meeting and took part in the discussions.</p>
13.	<p>TO SIGN AND RECEIVE THE MINUTES FROM THE MEETING DATED 04 JUNE 2013 (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting dated 04 June 2013 were agreed as a correct record.</p>

14.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT THE ITEMS OF BUSINESS MARKED PART 1 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THAT THE ITEMS MARKED AS PART 2 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>It was confirmed that all items would be considered in Part 1.</p>
15.	<p>MAJOR REVIEW: STRENGTHENING THE COUNCIL'S ROLE AS A CORPORATE PARENT - SECOND WITNESS SESSION (<i>Agenda Item 6</i>)</p> <p>To assist Members with the review Tedros Tzegai, Foster Carer; Keith Ivey, Foster Carer; Stephen White, Registered Manager for Hillingdon Children's Resource Centre; David Fry, Service Manager, Children's Resources; and Ann Holmes, Service Manager, Children in Care were present to provide information to the Committee.</p> <p>A summary of the evidence provided by the Committee is set out below.</p> <p>Foster Carers</p> <p>Mr Ivey advised that he had been a single foster carer since 2007 and that his experience had initially been with challenging, local adolescents and, more recently, with unaccompanied asylum seekers. Although there were barriers in caring for asylum seekers due to their uncertain status, he noted that a number had gone on to university and significant, personal progress had been made with others. Mr Ivey noted that he had started to foster because of work that he had done previously with LAC in some of the Borough's residential children's homes and in providing Supervised Contact. Through this he had become aware of the positive impact that fostering could have on vulnerable children's lives and how rewarding the role could be.</p> <p>Mr Tzegai advised that he had been fostering children and young people between the ages of 5 and 17 years old for over 10 years. He explained that, with the support of the Council, the role involved assisting LAC with their health and education needs as well as offering them general support. Mr Tzegai advised that he had started to foster because he too had seen the positive impact that can be made on the children. He noted that fostering could be challenging but also satisfying when children progressed.</p> <p>Both witnesses advised that the support offered by the Council was of a high quality. The training courses that foster carers were required to attend had been improving and they appropriately addressed the issues facing the diverse range of children coming through the Borough's care system. Foster carers also received valuable support from the Council through monthly meetings with their supervisors. In particular, witnesses praised the Council for the continuity of the Foster Care Team despite changes to the structure of the service.</p> <p><u>Challenges Facing Those Leaving Foster Care</u></p> <p>Witnesses advised that one of the major challenges faced by LAC in foster care was that they were required to leave their placement and move into independent living between the ages of 17 and 18. Foster carers were able to provide some support in this transition but care leavers were not offered the level of support and guidance that a parent would offer to their own child. It was noted that this posed particular problems when young people were at critical times in their studies as the move out of foster care could be disruptive to their education, especially where their new accommodation was</p>

removed from their school or college.

It was noted that the transition was also often emotionally difficult for young people as they felt isolated at a difficult and formative period of their lives. Foster carers did as much as they could to ease the transition to independence but they often had other responsibilities that meant that they were required to stand back at some point.

In response to questions on how the support offered to care leavers moving into independence could be improved, witnesses suggested that there should be no strict “cut off” age at which young people were required to leave foster care. A tapered approach would be more appropriate and would allow young people to get into work prior to moving into independence. It was also noted that foster carers should have more of an input in the next stages of young people’s lives as was often a stressful time.

Officers advised that the Council did have a “staying put” policy which meant that, if a foster child was in education, he/she would be able to stay in a placement until their studies were complete. Decisions as to when young people were ready to leave care were made on a case-by-case basis and Members were reassured that there was no definite “cut off” point.

Officers also noted that there was no funding for foster children after the age of 18. Consequently, the Council began to prepare young people for independence from the age of 16 so that the full transition at 18 was as smooth as possible. To ensure that those leaving care were offered support during the transition to independence, the Council was currently increasing the number of Personal Advisors offering support during this period.

Council Support

Challenges to the Service

Witnesses noted that a current challenge facing residential children’s homes related to young people’s experience of the food available. The issue had arisen due to a food contract stipulating that all food had to be purchased through a central system rather than directly by staff. This was not felt to be conducive to teaching domestic self-management skills to residents of the homes. Witnesses suggested that, if possible and financially viable, a recommendation could be included in the final report that asked that the contract be varied to allow more flexibility.

Members raised concerns that not enough was known about the contract in question to make a recommendation on it at this stage. Officers noted that they would investigate the issue further and report findings back to Members outside of the meeting.

Witnesses also highlighted challenges with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and the difficulties that they had with getting support for a young person not in a stable placement. It was noted that CAMHS restricted access to some services if the child was not in a stable placement. Witnesses stated that, in their views, most children in care had some form of mental health issue but CAMHS did not necessarily recognise their specific needs. As a result of this the Council was required to use its in-house psychological services to provide support despite capacity issues. It was noted that the Council currently had a 0.6 full time equivalent psychologist post in the Children in Care team with a further 1 full time equivalent post supporting Hillingdon foster carers. Extending this to 2.5 full time equivalent overall could lead to a significant

improvement in the support of LAC.

Officers advised that a significant proportion of the Borough's LAC were placed outside of the Borough and that this exacerbated some of the challenges with CAMHS. As a result of these challenges, local authorities with which Hillingdon LAC were placed may not have attempted to get CAMHS support for a child and, instead, supported them with their own in-house services. This was problematic as no brokerage between local authorities on mental health support took place. The role of acting as broker in such cases would usually be undertaken by CAMHS but for this to take place the LAC would have to be within the system. Consequently, there was the risk that there were children with complex needs waiting for years to receive appropriate support.

Witnesses advised that the major challenge with the CAMHS service was with flexibility and thresholds for access. To ensure that the needs of LAC were met, the ease and speed with which children with mental health problems were provided CAMHS support would need to improve drastically.

Engaging Children

Witnesses advised that LAC's feedback was gathered in a number of ways to better understand the views of children. This included gathering feedback from children in care participation groups. It was noted that the best way to gain feedback and safeguard LAC was through the development of relationships with frontline staff and social workers.

Education

With regards to increasing the Borough's capacity for supporting LAC, it was suggested that schools currently being built could have residential arrangements developed alongside them. Such facilities had been put in place by local authorities elsewhere in the country.

Members expressed an interest in the suggestion and it was agreed that further investigation into its viability would be undertaken by officers and reported to Members in due course.

The Chairman asked that the remaining witnesses provide written responses to the questions set out below. Responses would be circulated to Members outside of the meeting.

1. How can the Council promote the best interests of young people in education (especially given that the raising of participation age support was now provided until the age of 25) and their emotional wellbeing?
2. How can the Council better prepare young people for independent living?

Permanency

Officers noted that the Council aimed to maintain children in their family unit for as long as possible. To achieve this, social workers undertook a significant amount of early intervention work in the community and at the Borough's children's centres. However, when the risk to the child was deemed to be sufficiently high, the Council did seek permanency.

Members raised concerns that, in many cases, children should have been removed from their family much earlier than they were.

Officers advised that removing children from a family was not straight forward, especially where the issues related to chronic neglect, and that this was hotly contested in the courts. In many cases, children were also extremely committed to their families which made it difficult to secure early permanence.

A Member raised concerns that the quality of care at Jupiter House Foyer was not of the highest quality and that young people at the facility felt isolated and alone.

Officers advised that they would investigate the service provided by Jupiter House Foyer and report findings back to a future meeting.

During the course of discussion, officers advised that the recent BBC Panorama documentary, "Kids Lost in Care" had inaccurately reported on the figures with regards to LAC in Hillingdon. The following figures were provided for clarification:

	Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Inadequate
31 December 2013	7	6	2	0
26 June 2013	9	9	3	0

Officers advised that they were in the process of liaising with the journalist involved with regard to this inaccuracy.

Resolved: That:

1. **David Fry, Ann Holmes and Stephen White to provide written answers to the following questions:**
 - a) **How can the Council promote the best interests of young people in education (especially given that support is now provided until the age of 25) and their emotional wellbeing?**
 - b) **How can the Council better prepare young people for independent living?**
2. **Merlin Joseph to investigate issues raised with regards to Jupiter House. Steven Maiden to circulate findings outside of the meeting.**
3. **Merlin Joseph to investigate what scope there was for varying the food contract in place for residential homes. Steven Maiden to circulate findings outside of the meeting.**
4. **Julien Kramer to investigate the viability of developing residential arrangements for LAC in future schools building programmes.**

16. **CABINET FORWARD PLAN** (*Agenda Item 7*)

A Member asked for further information on the admission of girls into the Abbotsfield School for Boys post-16 centre.

Officers advised that the proposal was in the early stages and that further information would be provided on the issue in due course.

Resolved: That the Committee noted the Forward Plan.

17.	WORK PROGRAMME (<i>Agenda Item 8</i>) Resolved: That the Committee noted the dates of the meetings and the Committee's future business.
	The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 9.32 pm.

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Steven Maiden on 01895 250692. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.