

Minutes

SOCIAL CARE, HOUSING AND PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

12 June 2019

Meeting held at Committee Room 5 Civic Centre, High Street, Uxbridge

	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors Jane Palmer (Chairman), Duncan Flynn (Vice-Chairman), Alan Deville, Ian Edwards, Tony Eginton, Janet Gardner, Becky Haggar and Paula Rodrigues</p> <p>LBH Officers Present: Anisha Teji – Democratic Services Officer, Debby Weller – Policy and Strategy Manager (Housing), Tony Zaman - Corporate Director – Adults, Children and Young People, Zafer Yilkan – Assistant Director of Corporate Parenting, and Sandra Taylor – Director of Provider Services and Commissioned Care</p> <p>In attendance: Councillor Steve Tuckwell (Borough Champion for Mental Health)</p>
3.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TO REPORT THE PRESENCE OF ANY SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Judith Cooper.</p>
4.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>Councillor Ian Edwards declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 5 – Committee Review: Universal Credit and Other Welfare Benefit Changes as he and one of the witnesses present were fellow trustees of a local organisation. He stayed for the discussion of the item.</p>
5.	<p>TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS ON 11 APRIL 2019 AND 9 MAY 2019 (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>It was noted that the Cabinet Member for Education and Children’s Services had been invited to attend the June POC meeting but was unable to do so due to other meeting commitments.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 April 2019 and 9 May 2019 be agreed as a correct record.</p>
6.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT THE ITEMS OF BUSINESS MARKED AS PART I WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THAT THE ITEMS MARKED AS PART II WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>It was confirmed that all items marked Part I would be heard in public, and all items marked Part II would be heard in private.</p>

7. **COMMITTEE REVIEW: UNIVERSAL CREDIT AND OTHER WELFARE BENEFIT CHANGES** (*Agenda Item 5*)

The Committee heard witness evidence in relation to its review on Universal Credit (UC). It was noted that the representative from Hillingdon MIND was no longer able to attend the meeting.

Citizens Advice Hillingdon

The Director of Citizens Advice Hillingdon (CAB), UC Help to Claim Supervisor and Research and Campaigns Volunteer attended the meeting to provide an account of UC.

A number of documents had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting including anonymised claimant case studies, responses to a list of questions sent on behalf of the Committee prior to the meeting and a presentation on the 'Help to Claim' service and the challenges it encountered.

The following key points were noted:

- A majority of the CAB's 'Help To Claim' referrals had been directed from the Job Centre Plus through signposting and formal referrals. There had only been a handful of local authority referrals thus far. More needed to be done to assist claimants once payments had been made and beyond the initial application stage.
- The client profile for service users was distinctive and it was reported that the White UK take up was low. The CABs 'Help To Claim' service had seen a large take up by Black and Ethnic Minorities in the Borough.
- The main challenges occurred when legacy benefits stopped as there were risks that claimants could spiral into debt and there was no safety net in place to help. This had led to an increase in food bank vouchers being issued.
- In order to be eligible to claim UC, claimants would have had to have passed or be exempt from the Habitual Residence Test. There were delays with decision making and a number of decisions had been challenged. The Department for Work and Pensions had no deadlines or timeframes to respond which caused concern as there were no provisions in place for claimants waiting during this time.
- Clients found it difficult to manage digital platforms as there were often issues with claimants forgetting their passwords and accessing IT systems.
- Home visits reportedly only took place to check ID documents as part of the verification process.

Claimants were provided with a lot of information and, sometimes, important messages about how specific changes could impact people's lives were not clear. In order to make the process clearer for claimants, it was suggested that only significant and relevant information was provided to claimants and a database of resources was created. Another suggestion was to have a Department of Work and Pensions member of staff present at services such as the 'One Stop Shop' to answer any queries and help foster relationships.

The CAB had introduced a new initiative to assist claimants making UC applications. A pro forma letter had been created which indicated when a claimant needed assistance with their application and the purpose of the letter was to prevent any claims being stopped or any sanctions being imposed.

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

The Chairman read out a statement submitted by the DWP which indicated that no representatives were able to attend the meeting as it was being broadcasted. The DWP confirmed that they were happy to answer any questions sent on behalf of the Committee and would be willing to meet the Committee separately at a future date to address the concerns raised.

It was noted that another email had been submitted by the DWP answering the questions that had been sent to them prior to the meeting. A decision was made not to read the answers as no representatives were in attendance to elaborate, but to circulate them to the Committee.

Although the DWP had responded to the questions and had offered to meet the Chairman to discuss the prepared answers, a decision was made not to meet the DWP outside of the Committee meeting in order to ensure openness and transparency in the review's evidence gathering process and to enable the Committee to make fair recommendations.

DASH

The Chief Officer and Lead of Advice Projects from DASH attended the meeting to provide their account of UC. Dash was a charity that specifically supported people with learning and physical disabilities.

It was explained that many people found the online platform difficult to navigate, particularly those with learning and physical disabilities and home visits were an important part of the process. A number of claimant case studies were provided to the Committee and it was highlighted that one case involved over 30 hours of support with making an application and continued ongoing support would still need to be provided.

Members thanked the officers for their attendance and the information given.

RESOLVED: That the information in the report and witness evidence be noted and that additional information from the DWP be circulated to Members.

8. CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL DRAFT MINUTES (Agenda Item 6)

Members reviewed the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Panel meeting, noting the activity undertaken with young people and sought clarifications where required. Members were informed that there had been a request at the Corporate Parenting Panel to see the Council's Sufficiency Strategy.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Parenting Panel minutes from the meeting on 22 May 2019 be noted.

9. FORWARD PLAN (Agenda Item 7)

Members discussed upcoming executive business and sought clarifications where required.

RESOLVED: That the forward plan be noted.

10.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME (<i>Agenda Item 8</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the work programme be noted.</p>
11.	<p>CHILDREN'S HOME: OFSTED INSPECTION (<i>Agenda Item 9</i>)</p> <p><i>This item was discussed as a Part II item without the press or public present as the information under discussion contained confidential or exempt information as defined by law in the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985. This was because it discussed 'information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual' (paragraph 2 of the schedule to the Act).</i></p> <p>The Committee received a report detailing how a children's home was operating following a recent Ofsted inspection. In light of the inspection outcomes, a Member site visit had been undertaken to see what improvement measures had been taken to date. The Committee also received a report from Council officers showing the detailed action plan and work that had been and was currently being undertaken to satisfactorily address the issues raised by the inspections.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the report be noted.</p>
	<p>The meeting, which commenced at 7.06 pm, closed at 8.33 pm.</p>

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Anisha Teji on 01895 277655. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.

The public part of this meeting was filmed live on the Council's YouTube Channel to increase transparency in decision-making, however these minutes remain the official and definitive record of proceedings.