

Minutes

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

12 November 2020

PRIVATE - this virtual meeting will be held without a Live Broadcast - VIRTUAL (PART 2)



HILLINGDON
LONDON

	<p>Voting Panel Members Present: Councillors Nick Denys (Co-Chairman), Heena Makwana (Vice-Chairman), and Tony Eginton</p> <p>Non-Voting Panel Members Present: Children in Care Council Member (Co-Chairman), Children in Care Council Members, Helen Smith (Principal Social Worker and Corporate Parenting Manager), Kathryn Angelini (Virtual School Head Teacher), Siobhan Appleton (Designated LAC Nurse), Alex Coman (Head of Service for Safeguarding and Partnership)</p> <p>LBH Officers Present: Tehseen Kauser (Interim Head of Service for Looked After Children and Leaving Care), Michelle Thomas (Lead Officer for Child Protection and Review), Ryan Dell (Democratic Services), Nikki O'Halloran (Democratic Services)</p>
1.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies for absence had been received from a Children in Care Council Member.</p>
2.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest.</p>
3.	<p>MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 17 SEPTEMBER 2020 (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>It was agreed that the minutes be amended to reflect the meeting being co-chaired by a Children in Care Council member and to include reference to apologies from the Foster Carer Representative.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That, subject to the agreed amendments, the minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2020 be agreed as a correct record.</p>
4.	<p>SAFEGUARDING LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>Officers noted the importance of lockdown measures and the report described the safeguarding activities that occurred during lockdown periods. For example, LAC reviews had been conducted online, which had positives and negatives. Family contact with young people had continued virtually when face-to-face contact had not been possible. Officers also utilised outdoor spaces in the summer to enable contact between young people and families. Social Workers and PA's kept in regular contact with those who were isolating - 'Shout Out' newsletters were now part of the engagement with children.</p> <p>Supporting Social Workers and children's Social Workers continued to provide support</p>

to Foster Carers and residential units.

Due to the presence of Heathrow Airport in the Borough, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) regularly arrived in Hillingdon. 13 new UASC arrived during the summer, and been placed in the Borough's in-house children's home which had additional facilities for testing and isolation. It was noted that whilst isolation remained necessary, there was in-house provision for this for newly arrived UASC. It was noted that the Virtual Fostering Panel continued to operate, but did so online. Independent Regulation 44 visits also continued, and conducted virtually only in May.

Support had been provided by DfE in the form of 800 laptops and tablets which had been distributed to young people across the Borough. Councillor Eginton questioned whether the 800 laptops were all for LAC. Officers clarified that the laptops were for all children who required them for educational purposes, of which 350-400 were LAC.

Children's Services and Education teams met regularly to aid support to children. 91% had attended school in September; this was higher than the national average.

17 young people were currently living in 'Stay Put' arrangements (staying with foster carers beyond the age of 18).

It was noted that going forward a blended approach of virtual and face-to-face contact would be appreciated by children, as virtual contact could be used more frequently in between face-to-face visits. However, young people did prefer face-to-face contact. Councillor Makwana questioned the effectiveness of the blended approach, and noted that younger children often have difficulty with virtual contact. Officers clarified that they were increasing face-to-face visits where appropriate, with a case-by-case risk assessment. Officers noted that arranging family contact could be challenging due to managing COVID-19 risks, but efforts made to enable family contact were appreciated by young people.

Councillor Denys asked how social workers felt about the blended approach and officers noted that there were mixed feelings but they had adapted well to virtual methods. While it was natural to want face-to-face contact, both virtual and face-to-face methods had their merits.

RESOLVED: That the content of the report be noted.

5. **ANNUAL REPORT FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS**
(Agenda Item 5)

It was noted that this report contained information pertaining to the 2019-20 financial years and had been due to be presented to the Panel at earlier meetings, had these not been cancelled.

It was noted that, at the end of the financial year, the London Borough of Hillingdon was Corporate Parent to 337 children and young people in care and 459 care leavers (18-25 years old). 89 of the children looked after were UASC.

A new approach was noted whereby young people were allowed to choose the social worker they want to work with. This had a clear positive impact.

The Fostering Service had worked well to achieve greater stability for the children. 10% of children had placement moves over the year which was an improvement from 11% in 2018-19.

In terms of stability of young people, the average Children's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) score for Hillingdon was 12.5, reduced from 13.2 the previous year. (The lower the score, the more settled the children were).

Priorities going forward included ensuring that processes and practices for achieving formally approved permanence for LAC and Young People were achieved in a timely manner; ensuring children could choose their allocated worker; sustaining the great performance and enhancing understanding of the health profile of children.

Councillor Denys praised the achievements of children listed in the report, and it was noted that while the report detailed 2019-20, some of the events mentioned had been unable to take place this year due to lockdown.

Councillor Eginton suggested making employment support a priority such as through apprenticeships at the Council. Officers noted that this was being looked at and reference was made to the partnership with the national charity Drive Forward who worked with young people to support them in CV writing, interview skills, accessing training and finding employment. Reference was also made to Civil Service Care Leaver internships. Councillors would talk to their colleagues about additional possible opportunities.

RESOLVED: That the Panel noted the content of the report detailing the work with our Looked After Children during the financial year 2019-20.

6. **INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS (IRO) ANNUAL REPORT** (*Agenda Item 6*)

It was noted that this report contained information pertaining to the 2019-20 financial year. It was noted that LAC had an IRO up to the age of 18, and that IROs were Council employees, not agency workers, which allowed them to build strong relationships with the children. Councillor Makwana noted that it was encouraging for IROs to be Council-employed, rather than agency workers, allowing continuity with LAC.

It was noted that, as defined by the Children Act, 1989, a child was deemed to be Looked After if:

- They were subject to a Care Order or an Interim Care Order (Section 31 and Section 38 of the Children Act 1989)
- They had been voluntarily accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, including Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)
- Secure Remand or those remanded into Local Authority's Accommodation in accordance with Section 21 of the Children Act 1989

It was noted that when a child became Looked After, an initial review of their Looked After Plan had to take place within 20 working days, a second review within three months and subsequent reviews within six months. For LAC, 'permanency' was defined as being in a framework of emotional, physical and legal conditions that gave a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity.

It was noted that, during the reporting period 2019-2020, Hillingdon Council was a corporate parent to 337 children. 882 reviews were carried out during the year and, out of those, 751 were for children aged 4 and above. The rate of participation for children over 4 years old remained high at 93.9%.

Hillingdon was corporate parent for 89 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.

During the reporting year, 41 new UASC had entered care. Towards the end of the last year, in order to respond to the increasing need to support UASC arriving through Heathrow, an IRO had been allocated to take the lead on supporting the UASC cohort.

LAC by age continued to show a distinct pattern reflective of the Borough location and area of need. Children aged 12 and above still made up the majority of the LAC population with a marked increase in children aged 16-17 which appeared attributable to young people seeking asylum.

IRO's had an established escalation pathway. Many escalations could be (and were) resolved at the informal stage through discussion with the Social Worker and Team Manager, thereafter if necessary, the formal escalation process would commence. In the year ending March 2020, 24 escalations were made of which only two were not able to be resolved at the informal stage. These two formal escalations were resolved at Stage 1 of the formal process.

It was noted that the IRO service's objectives were focussed around three main areas: Participation; Effective Care and Permanency Planning; and Practice Leadership.

Councillor Denys questioned the '19.30% of children looked after at year end were in a long-term fostering arrangement' figure. It was clarified that this figure represented those that had been formally recognised, and was in line with previous years. It was agreed that permanency planning would be discussed at the next meeting for possible inclusion on the agenda in April 2021.

Councillor Denys asked officers to provide numbers of those placements in and out of Hillingdon. It was agreed that this information would be circulated to Members.

At the end of this item, Councillor Denys left the meeting and Councillor Makwana took over as chair.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

7. **VIRTUAL SCHOOL HEADTEACHER'S ANNUAL REPORT** (*Agenda Item 7*)

It was noted that this report contained information pertaining to the 2018-19 academic year. The end of KS2 and KS4 had showed strong results, with 67% of the KS2 cohort achieving Age Related Expectation in reading. Reference was made to TextNow, an innovative reading programme that increased young people's motivation and engagement in reading. Of the post-16s, 42% were studying at Level 3 and 83% had gone on to University.

It was noted that there had been a 1.5% improvement in school attendance for children of statutory school age and a 16% reduction in exclusions. Councillor Eginton questioned the figures of Persistent Absentees. It was clarified that the report should have referenced 17% (not 17 persistent absentees), representing a 3% increase.

Reference was made to Jamie's Farm, a new programme that consisted of a visit four times per year. Reference was also made to the Designated Teacher Forum. A Children in Care Council member questioned the involvement of care leavers in trips to Jamie's Farm, and it was clarified that funding for the virtual school was only for children in care up to the age of 16, and so the virtual school were able to offer fewer trips for care leavers than younger children. It was noted that care leavers were invited on trips as mentors.

Reference was made to the Pupil Premium Plus - a grant received for the 232 Hillingdon LAC who had been in care for at least one day or more and were in full time education. It was noted that there was a large number of those in KS4 living semi-independently whilst studying for GCSEs.

Councillor Makwana questioned the EHCP spend on SEN, and it was clarified that the EHCP funding might not be enough to meet their needs so this shortfall needed to be made up from PPP.

Councillor Makwana questioned the 'Average PPP Spend by Borough Type' graph, and it was clarified who the comparison was made with. It was noted that in future, a key may be useful for these graphs.

Councillor Eginton questioned the financial viability of the activities listed under Resources/ Support Intervention. Officers clarified that the release of funding happened in two stages, and the second could be withheld if progress was not satisfactory. It was also noted that it could be difficult to measure soft results, such as the benefit of trips to Jamie's Farm.

RESOLVED: That the Panel noted:

- 1. the positive attainment outcomes for Looked After Children at the end of Key Stages Two and Four in comparison with LAC nationally.**
- 2. the increase in young people at Post 16 studying at Level Three and consequently going on to study at University.**
- 3. the ongoing focus on attendance and exclusions for all Hillingdon LAC, but particularly those studying at Key Stage Four.**
- 4. the use and impact of Pupil Premium Plus funding to achieve positive outcomes for Hillingdon LAC.**
- 5. the continuing success of a varied enrichment and intervention programme to benefit Hillingdon LAC.**
- 6. the strong and continued joint working with social care teams, Designated Teachers in schools, young people and carers in achieving outcomes for Hillingdon LAC.**

8. CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE DATA (Agenda Item 8)

It was noted that there were five desired outcomes: to be the best version of themselves; to enjoy good physical and mental health; to have pride in their unique identities; to live somewhere where they felt they belonged; and to be and feel safe.

It was noted that 100% of PEPs had been completed within timescales. It was also noted that average attendance was 93.6%, which was higher than the previous year. The percentage of LAC with 1+ Fixed Term Exclusions had reduced from 2.4% to 1.8%. The percentage of LAC NEET reduced from 11% to 5%.

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was noted. The average score of the last SDQs as at the end of September 2020 was just under 12. This compared positively with the latest figures reported by England (14.2) and Hillingdon's Statistical Neighbours (13.75), (the lower the SDQ score the better). The SDQ score had decreased during lockdown which indicated that, despite the pressure created by COVID-19, all carers and professionals continued to provide the best care. It was also noted that children who had medium and high scores (17 or above) were referred to the Council's in-house Multi-Agency Psychology Service (MAPs) for consultation and/or early therapeutic intervention.

	<p>It was noted that 90% of children had their health assessments completed and that there remained a small number of young people who were repeat refusers of an annual health assessment. All children under 18 had had their LAC reviews in the last 12 months.</p> <p>It was noted that 22% of the total LAC population was UASC. It was noted that the percentage of LAC accommodated under Section 20 was slightly higher than the national average, which reflected the high percentage of UASC in the LAC population. 86% of LAC statutory visits were up to date. Many of those LAC visits that were not reported as up to date may have been undertaken but, if the child or young person failed to keep the appointment and was not seen as part of the visits, the visit was not recorded as completed.</p> <p>Most of Hillingdon's care leavers aged 19-21 were living independently, which included shared houses, University accommodation, privately rented accommodation, or those with their own Council tenancy. 9 young people remained with their foster carers under the Staying Put arrangement. There was an appointed Senior Personal Advisor who was working with young people at risk of homelessness. There were no care leavers who were street homeless or rough sleeping.</p> <p>It was noted that Hillingdon was the first London Council to offer social worker apprenticeships and 5 social worker apprentices had now been allocated to front line teams as part of their 3 years social work apprenticeship.</p> <p>Councillor Eginton questioned the figure of seven children without a school place. It was clarified that this had reduce to five since the report was written.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the content of the report be noted.</p>
9.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME (<i>Agenda Item 9</i>)</p> <p>It was suggested that the next Virtual School Annual Report be presented to the panel in February 2021, not April.</p> <p>It was noted that the LAC Health Team Annual Report should be available for the February meeting to coincide with the end of the financial year.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Work Programme, as amended, be agreed.</p>
	<p>The meeting, which commenced at 5.30 pm, closed at 7.32 pm.</p>

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Ryan Dell on 01895 25 0833. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors and officers.
