

Minutes

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Tuesday 07 November 2023

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



	<p>To Members of the Panel:</p> <p>Voting Members: Councillor Nick Denys (Chairman) Councillor Heena Makwana (Vice-Chairman) Councillor Barry Nelson-West</p> <p>Non - voting Members: Representatives of the Children in Care Council, and Care Leavers Helen Smith, Principal Social Worker Emma Kavanagh, Assistant Director Corporate Parenting and Fostering Kathryn Angelini, Assistant Director for Education & Vulnerable Children Alex Coman, Director for Safeguarding, Partnership and Quality Assurance Dr Kate Head, Designated Doctor for Children Looked After in Hillingdon</p> <p><i>Note: this meeting was co-chaired by a Children in Care Council member.</i></p> <p>Officers Present: Rebecca Reid, Democratic Services Apprentice Ryan Dell, Democratic Services Officer</p>
8.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jan Sweeting, with Councillor Barry Nelson-West substituting.</p>
9.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest.</p>
10.	<p>MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting dated 25 July 2023 be approved as an accurate record.</p>
11.	<p>ANNUAL CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIP REPORT (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>The Director for Safeguarding, Partnership and Quality Assurance presented the Children's Safeguarding Partnership Report, which summarised the work undertaken by Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership to support and safeguard Hillingdon's residents, both adults with support and care needs and vulnerable children and their families.</p> <p>Members heard from officers that in respect of safeguarding arrangements, there was shared and equal responsibility for safeguarding between the three statutory partners –</p>

namely, the Local Authority, Metropolitan Police Service and NHS North West London Integrated Care Board.

This approach was reinforced by the rotation of chairing responsibility across the three senior strategic Boards – the Executive Leadership Group (ELG), Safeguarding Adults Board and Safeguarding Children Partnership Board.

To develop the priorities, the safeguarding partnership had subgroups, each with a plan of work that sought to develop practice using a framework of prevention, identification, and response. These sub-groups were generally well attended across aspects of partnership work.

It was within the purview of the senior strategic Boards' responsibility to scrutinise the Safeguarding Partnership's dedicated sub-groups, recognise progress made and establish priorities.

Regular independent scrutiny was carried out to provide a holistic, independent critical challenge and appraisal into the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements that supported learning and future development for children and adults.

Officers highlighted that the Council's Independent Scrutineer had analysed the effectiveness of safeguarding practice and concluded that there were many strengths to the safeguarding arrangements for children and adults across Hillingdon, including a mature partnership open to scrutiny and challenge, and one that strived to continually learn and improve practice.

Prioritisation strategies included child sexual abuse and contextual safeguarding, including youth violence. Early intervention and the Stronger Families approach were monitored to prevent children from needing statutory services.

Attention was drawn by officers to a new Safeguarding group that launched at the beginning of the current financial year.

Questions were raised by the Chairman to the Children in Care Council Members about the extent to which young people felt safe and how they went about reporting safety concerns if they did not feel safe.

One Children in Care Council Member expressed some young people found it difficult to report a safeguarding issue for fear of what might happen if they did, but that they could feel comfortable talking to a friend about the issue.

Another Children in Care Council Member added the belief among some young people that if they were to open up to report a safeguarding issue, nothing would happen.

The Chairman questioned if there were different levels of reporting safeguarding issues. Officers responded there were numerous targeted support services in place to help improve the ease of reporting safeguarding issues, including counselling and alcohol support services.

For Local Authority (LA) children, officers concentrated focus on relationship-based practice to the effect that young people would open up more and communicate with a trusted adult, such as a social support worker, youth worker or justice officer.

Quality assurance audits were undertaken across children's social care including for Looked After children and Care experienced young people. The outcomes were consistently positive, providing assurance about the impact of safeguarding arrangements in practice in Hillingdon.

It was noted that there were strong relationships and a safe space for disclosures to be raised with regard to placements for older children.

There were far better outcomes when it came to return home interviews because young people were more likely to engage in dialogue with people who they knew.

There was an operationally good partnership with ICB colleagues, the police, and other partners.

Following consultation, the findings from the Children's Annual Report 2022-23 painted a positive picture that professionals were going above and beyond to help the children, and that many children were aware of the safeguarding services available to them. Concerns raised by the young people included worries about preparation for adulthood. Recommendations set out by the young people suggested enforcing mandatory attendance at Walking in Our Shoes training to support professionals to understand the perspective of the child, establish a mentoring scheme, and meet with senior leaders to find out more about the work they do.

Officers referred to the Voice of the Child Engagement Report, where children participated in LAC reviews every 6 months. Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) reviews would take place prior to the LAC reviews.

The take-up of Coram advocacy was high, and issues raised by the young people were treated as confidential and required their explicit consent to progress the matter. The Panel stressed the importance of the voice of the child.

The Virtual School Headteacher observed that school is the place where young people spent most of their time, felt safe, can make disclosures, and one where teachers can build relationships with the young people as trusted adults. This was supported from an ICB perspective and attention was drawn to the importance of being openly visible when it came to safeguarding approaches.

The Director for Safeguarding, Partnership and Quality Assurance shared a video produced by the Children in Care Council on group discussions that took place with the Safeguarding Partnership about their interactions with professionals that had supported them, and also expressed their lived experience and expert knowledge about what it felt like to be in receipt of a safeguarding service.

What went well across the Safeguarding Partnership in the view of the young people was workers going above and beyond their roles, visits in comfortable environments, fun activities, young people feeling safe in care, young people's requests being actioned, and awareness raising sessions.

However, worries of the young people related to crime, feeling unsafe in some parts of the Borough, being unable to trust some professionals, some children were not living in nice places or getting enough food, too many school exclusions and parents needing more help.

The Children in Care Council members shared suggestions on how things could be made better for young people in Hillingdon. Feedback included that professionals working with young people should attend Walking in Our Shoes training, services for children and young people should listen to them more, there should be help and support earlier rather than leaving things to become bigger problems, the duty system was unhelpful, better housing and support for young people leaving care and the community should be made better and safer.

Members sought clarification on what was meant by the duty system being unhelpful, to which the response by officers was that some young people did not know the duty workers well enough and therefore, struggled to open up and speak with them. This problem stressed a need for duty workers covering other staff to be continually kept abreast of young people's situations at all stages of support provided to children and young people.

The Chairman enquired about how officers were currently meeting the young people's requests to make the community safer.

The Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting and Fostering explained young people had access to find out who their allocated workers were and information about them. A profile of the allocated worker was available, which shared some information about them, and their photo.

There was a statutory responsibility for professionals to visit the young people every 8 weeks, though young people were sometimes seen more regularly than this. This approach helped to encourage independence which was unique to the young person and observed how they worked together with their personal assistant.

Officers noted the Care Leaver Local Offer was not well published but was currently being worked on to be more user-friendly for young people exiting care and transitioning into adulthood.

RESOLVED: That the Panel:

- 1. Is reassured that the partnership continues to provide leadership and scrutiny of the safeguarding arrangements for Hillingdon residents;**
- 2. Is updated regarding the way in which the partnership has responded to the challenges posed by changing local, national and international contexts; and**
- 3. Is informed of the strategic priorities for safeguarding for 2022-23.**

12. CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE DATA Q2 (Agenda Item 5)

The Assistant Director of Corporate Parenting and Fostering presented the Children's Services Performance Data. There were 318 LAC reviews undertaken. It was noted that the wellbeing of care leavers was positive. Waiting lists were low for wellbeing support services.

There was a new Mental Health Pathway Lead whose role was centred on understanding how young people out of care could be best supported in their transition into adulthood. This was carried out through offering health passports for young people post-18 as well as giving advice on how to go to the doctors independently.

The *Ask Jan* service was, indeed, well subscribed, with very positive wellbeing support and access services face to face for young people.

It was reported that 89% of young people had up to date health assessments.

Identity and diversity statistics were promoted in the Children's Services Performance Data report. This was supported with recognition and celebration events.

52 young people in foster placements were placed within a 20-mile radius of the Borough. 10 young people were in *Staying Put* arrangements. Council officers were currently looking into the implementation of *Staying Close* placements within the Borough next month in December 2023.

Officers commented that there was a Social Work Apprenticeship Programme intended to enhance cross-service experiences and social work practice.

Fair access panel questions and questions about school places were raised by Members.

It was noted that attendance was higher with younger children than older children. Reasons for some young people dropping out of education included education courses not being suited to their interests. However, taster sessions were being offered to give young people a better insight into the educational courses best suited to their own personal interests.

Members proposed adding to the Work Programme an invitation to the Mental Health Pathway Lead to discuss their role and responsibilities in greater detail.

Members raised questions about how difficult it was for officers to find suitable accommodation for LAC and care leavers, to which the response was that LAC and care leavers were found accommodation but that the availability of accommodation was sometimes harder to source. However, *Staying Close* arrangements, shared housing and contracts with supported living providers were heavily used to better help young people transition into adulthood.

RESOLVED: That the Panel noted the contents of the report.

13. **UPDATE ON THE STAYING PUT PROGRAMME** (*Agenda Item 6*)

The Assistant Director of Corporate Parenting and Fostering provided a verbal update to Members on the *Staying Put* Programme.

It was reported that 10 young people were placed in *Staying Put* arrangements to stay with foster carers post-18 until the age of 21. Financial support was provided to the foster carers.

It was noted that a number of young people remained in family environments for longer periods of time before transitioning into adulthood.

There was demand for more *Staying Put* opportunities.

Careful considerations were made on how officers could recruit new foster carers through the transformation process regarding *Staying Put* arrangements.

Officers explained that in general, many people did not have a spare room for a younger child to move into. Additionally, post-pandemic, people who did have spare rooms were often using them differently as offices in working from home arrangements.

It was acknowledged that young people leaving care at the age of 18 and being fully independent was unrealistic, and that they required support beyond the age of 18 to stay in placements in the longer term.

The Chairman sought clarification on how *Staying Close* arrangements worked.

Officers referred to *Staying Close* as an arrangement for children who had been living in residential care or supported accommodation. It was for those children who had a connection to the Borough, with the aim of bringing children back to where their local community and identity was.

Staying Close arrangements did not involve placements in a family home but rather, a small, shared accommodation with 2-4 young people of a similar age and needs with holistic support that focused on health and wellbeing, promoting family and other relationships, identifying a network of support with an ex-social worker (or whoever the young person identified) and rebuilding fractured relationships.

There was an 'exit plan' in place to ensure that young people were supported to gain independent living, access to education and employment, and to find accommodation of their own. Young people were engaged in a network of support.

The Chairman asked further questions about the duration of *Staying Close* and *Staying Put* arrangements.

Officers responded that the *Staying Put* programme lasted until the young person turned 21 years old. The duration of the *Staying Close* programme for young people was 2-years and would end in March 2025.

RESOLVED: That the Panel noted the contents of the verbal update.

14. **UPDATE ON THE CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL PROJECT** (*Agenda Item 7*)

The Director for Safeguarding, Partnership and Quality Assurance provided a verbal update to Members on the Children's Residential project.

Members were informed that there was currently a national shortage of residential placements.

At the time of writing, there were 3 in-house residential placement provisions. Different residential properties that could accommodate young people were being explored. Officers were currently looking into demolishing a 13-bedroom building so as to rebuild that plot of land as a 12-bedroom residence across 6 buildings (2x 3-bed; 2x 2-bed and 2x 1-bed). There would also be an education centre, activities and contact with family (family time) onsite – these had been through a consultation process and the Planning Committee, which gained approval 3 weeks ago. The building work was to commence on the site in mid-November.

	<p>The site was developed with the aim of responding better to the type of provision needed for young people. A government grant was provided to fund the building works. The new buildings are scheduled for completion around December 2024.</p> <p>In response to Members' questions about the categorisation of need for young people, officers explained that a high level of need referred to behaviour, emotional regulation and the impact of abuse and trauma. This was not related to a high level of disability.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Panel noted the contents of the verbal update.</p>
15.	<p>KICA FEEDBACK (<i>Agenda Item 8</i>)</p> <p>The Principal Social Worker for Children shared a short video on the last KICA 2023 event, which noted great interactions between the young people and foster carers as well as sibling groups who were not living together. There was many heartwarming, shared moments of the event.</p> <p>Officers noted the KICA event was very well supported and had evolved to find a great balance between activity, food, and the recognition of achievements.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Panel noted the contents of the video.</p>
16.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME (<i>Agenda Item 9</i>)</p> <p>The Chairman noted that the Care Leaver's Offer would be considered at a future Corporate Parenting Panel meeting. It was noted that the Virtual School Annual Report was scheduled to be presented to the next Panel meeting. Although officers were awaiting the official Ofsted report around November 2023, the initial feedback from inspection was very positive. The Chairman invited the Mental Health Pathway Lead to attend a future meeting to discuss their role and responsibilities in greater detail in understanding how young people out of care could be best supported in their transition into adulthood.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Corporate Parenting Panel:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Considered the Work Programme report; and 2. Agreed the below amendments: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. To add an update on 'You Said, We Did', to take place in 6-12 months' time. b. To invite the new Mental Health Pathway Lead to a future meeting. c. To add the 'Care Leaver Offer' to the Work Programme for a future meeting.
	<p>The meeting, which commenced at 5:30 pm, closed at 6:55 pm.</p>

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions, please contact Rebecca Reid on democratic@hillingdon.gov.uk. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.