

Minutes

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Wednesday 24 January 2024

Meeting held at Committee Room 6 - Civic Centre,
High Street, Uxbridge UB8 1UW



	<p>To Members of the Panel:</p> <p>Voting Members: Councillor Nick Denys (Chair) Councillor Heena Makwana (Vice-Chair) Councillor Jan Sweeting</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 Bridget Owen, Designated Nurse Looked After Children (Harrow and Hillingdon) (NHS North West London ICB) Dr Kate Head, Designated Doctor for Children Looked After covering Harrow, Hillingdon and Brent (NHS North West London ICB)</p> <p><i>Note: this meeting was co-chaired by a Children in Care Council member.</i></p> <p>Officers Present: Aisling Knight, Children's Participation Team Manager Rebecca Reid, Democratic Services Apprentice Ryan Dell, Democratic Services Officer</p>
17.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>No apologies were received from Members.</p> <p>Officers noted apologies from the Senior Virtual School Practitioner; Service Manager, Hillingdon Youth Justice Service, AXIS & Mobile Detached Team; and Named Nurse for Children Looked After in Hillingdon (CNWL).</p>
18.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest.</p>
19.	<p>MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting dated 07 November 2023 be approved as an accurate record.</p>
20.	<p>VIRTUAL SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p>

Prior to the first item, the Chair noted that the recent Ofsted report demonstrated the 'brilliant' and 'outstanding' nature of the service provided by officers in Children's Services, further noting that this recognition was well-deserved. The Chair also acknowledged that it was good to have young people engaged, and that the performance of Children's Services had greatly improved over recent years. Reference was made to the Health and Social Care Select Committee's review into CAMHS referral pathways. Members added that the voice of the child played an important role, and Members further congratulated young people, Heads of Service and Directors.

Officers introduced the Virtual School Annual Report, noting that this report reflected the September 2022 – August 2023 academic year.

Achievement among Early Years and Key Stage 1 and 2 either met or exceeded expectations, though there had been some drop-off in Key Stage 3 and 4. Attainment 8 scores during the COVID-19 pandemic had been inflated, in part due to using teacher's grades instead of formal exams and had since returned to pre-pandemic levels. Key Stage 5 saw the highest ever number of students going to university.

Attendance continued to be an issue. Part of this was due to the COVID legacy. Average attendance among the Statutory School Age cohort was within the 80+% range, which was on par for Looked After Children. There had been a higher number of suspensions, although the figure for the previous year had been artificially lower due to the pandemic. There had been a reduction in suspensions for in-borough schools and there had been no permanent exclusions for Virtual School pupils.

There had been an increase in young people staying in the same school while moving placement.

Numbers of NEET (young people not in education, employment or training) were high, which reflected some COVID legacy. There was a feeling among the young people that if working from home was an option during the pandemic, it should also be an option subsequently. It was important to note that mental health was a factor in NEET numbers. Sometimes there was not an unwillingness to engage, but difficulties in knowing how to.

Officers noted that there were strong relationships with Brunel University and Jamie's Farm, and new links with Oxford University were highlighted.

PEP (Personal Education Plan) compliance continued to be a strength for the Virtual School. Completion rates in 2022/23 were maintained at 100% across the academic year and PEP standards were considered to be one of, if not the highest, in comparison to statistical neighbours. Over 98% of PEPs were quality assured to be of the highest standard. Young people noted that the 'cliff-edge' at 18 years old was difficult for young people. Officers noted that the Government was looking at extending the remit of virtual schools to the age of 25, which would bring more funding. The young people noted that they needed more options, although officers noted that there would always be a cut-off at some point. The young people further noted that not every young person goes to university; that they had benefited from the virtual school; and that it was good to have their voice heard. Officers noted that they had had recent similar conversations, further noting that young people formerly had to be in school until they were 16 years old, and now this was 18, where some young people are not ready to leave education at 18. Changes in thinking needed to be holistic.

Members asked about 'Emotional Based School Avoidance' and officers noted that this was a replacement term for 'school refusal'. Officers further noted that there were a

multitude of factors that combined within school avoidance and it was not necessarily that the young person will not go but that they cannot. Example factors included COVID and mental health. 'Emotional Based School Avoidance' was not a diagnosis but was a factor in persistent and severe absence. It was noted that the pull factors for staying at home sometimes outweighed the push factors for getting young people into school. There needed to be shared responsibility between schools/ health/ social care/ parents. There was also a factor of hybrid working and it was not unreasonable for young people to want the same in education.

Members asked and officers noted that relational based contact with young people was a benefit. Having the young person's voice heard and having a key officer were important. On this, the young people noted that, while having a key officer contact was important, that person also needed help from their senior officers.

Members asked about young people without a school place. Officers noted that there was an internal tracker for this which looked at the length of time young people spent in and out of education.

The Chair asked about allocating a Virtual School Officer to Looked After Children aged 2, and officers noted that this may aid in identifying issues earlier. It was noted that there was a very small cohort of these young people, roughly 5-8. It was further noted that for those who were born or very young during the pandemic, there been an impact on their speech, language and socialisation skills. The young people noted that it was a good idea to work with Virtual School Officer at younger ages as this may aid in prevention and avoid alienation.

Members asked about Pupil Premium Plus (PPP) funding to young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Officers noted that pupils with SEND often had separate EHCP funding, which could be used for an additional person in the classroom to support the young person; vision/ hearing aids and/or fidget toys for example.

In reference to funding, Members asked about a 'safety valve', and the effect this was having on the service. Officers noted that the service had not overspent DSG funding and so there was limited impact.

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

21. **CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE DATA Q3** (*Agenda Item 5*)

Officers introduced the Children's Services performance data report. As at 31 December 2023 the London Borough of Hillingdon was Corporate Parent to 324 Looked After Children and 608 Care Leavers.

It was noted that the overall performance was stable and positive. There had been no changes in SDQ (strengths and difficulties questionnaire) outcomes, and mental health outcomes were comparatively positive compared to statistical neighbours. All young people who scored highly on this questionnaire were referred to the in-house Multi-Agency Psychology Service (MAPS), and CNWL (Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust) had recently appointed a named Young Adults 16 to 25 Mental Health Pathway Lead for Hillingdon. Officers were currently interviewing for a Transitions Nurse who would work with care experienced young people, within the Staying Close project, to support them with any identified physical and emotional wellbeing needs.

Currently 92% of young people had up to date health assessments. This was better than both Statutory Neighbours and the national average. It was noted that there had been a small number of refusals; and some unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who may have moved placement before their assessment could be carried out. Officers noted good relationships with health colleagues.

Reference was made to the Staying Close programme which had launched at the end of November 2023. There were currently four young people in the Staying Close programme, with a further four set to join in February 2024. It was planned that there would be up to 15 young people in the programme by the end of the financial year. It was noted that there was now a project manager in place.

Members asked about engagement in education, referencing the 12 children without a school place noted in the report. Officers noted that this was more to do with suitability of placement rather than an issue of capacity. There was an average of 8-12 young people without a school place at any one time but it was important to note that it was not always the same young people. It could take time to find SEND placements; some emergency placements happened very quickly; there was a possibility for a tuition package to be put in place; and new arrivals could be put into temporary provision. On this, the young people noted that moving location can mean it can take a while to find a school place and further noted that, depending on age, this may not be too stressful for the young people themselves as there were a range of other factors for them to consider (for example moving to a new town/ city).

Members noted where the report stated "One child has an application in place and a local school is being challenged by admissions to accept her".

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

22. **LAC HEALTH TEAM ANNUAL REPORT (POWERPOINT) (Agenda Item 6)**

Officers from the LAC Health team gave a presentation to the Panel. It was noted that the full annual report would be shared with Members the following day.

The presentation had been put together by the Named Nurse for Children Looked After in Hillingdon (from Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust (CNWL)) and was presented by the Designated Nurse Looked After Children (Harrow and Hillingdon) and Designated Doctor for Children Looked After covering Harrow, Hillingdon and Brent (both from NHS North West London ICB).

There was a Named Nurse for Children Looked After in Hillingdon. There was currently no Named Doctor, but this position was being recruited for.

It was noted that there were complex mental health trends.

Within Hillingdon the population of males was slightly higher (55.6%) than females (44.4%). This was in line with London statistics (M 59%, F 41%).

It was noted that health assessments were undertaken for Hillingdon young people. It was noted that 143 children in the care of Hillingdon Borough lived in Hillingdon and had their health assessments undertaken by the LAC Health Service and some undertaken by school nurses and health visitors. 174 children in the care of Hillingdon Borough lived out of the borough, and had their health assessments completed by various health services across the country. 156 children in the care of other areas lived in Hillingdon

where their health assessments were undertaken. This could create difficulties in completing health assessments on time.

Initial health assessments (IHAs) were conducted within 20 days of the child becoming looked after. Challenges faced included securing appropriate clinic space; Hillingdon children being placed out-of-borough; and an increase in complex health issues. Sometimes age assessments were taken of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. It was noted that paediatricians carried out initial assessments at Hillingdon Hospital.

There had been an increase in the timeliness of completing health assessments. It was noted that Children's Services and health colleagues had different timescales but there was robust joint working. From the Integrated Care Board's (ICB) point of view, there was an attempt to standardise across local authorities.

Review health assessments (RHAs) were conducted once per year for children aged over five years. There had been an increase in strategy meetings and in A&E attendance. There had also been an increase in the number of out-of-borough children and an increase in complex health needs such as mental health. There was a Transitions Nurse available two days per week to assist in conducting health assessments.

Feedback from a peer review was shared, noting the team's "can do, will do" attitude and the positive work being produced.

Feedback from young people was also shared, which included a comment that "the nurse is very nice and good".

Next steps included a new client satisfaction survey; working with social care colleagues to make improvements; continue to offer training sessions to social care colleagues, health professionals and others; hopes to start health promotion sessions in care homes; and working with young people to improve and expand the service.

It was noted that NHS North West London ICB covered eight Local Authorities.

A word-cloud of health needs identified in assessments was displayed, noting CAMHS/ counselling, dental and sleep among the key terms identified.

The health need of 'growth and development' was noted. This reflected reaching milestones at the expected time. Sleep was also noted as an important factor in the development of young people. The young people noted that lack of sleep can lead to permanent issues. Immunisations were noted and it was further acknowledged that young people including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children may have missed vaccines. It was clarified that the COVID-19 vaccine was not compulsory.

Officers clarified that GDD referred to 'global developmental delay'. This was where two or more milestones had not been met by the expected time.

The young people noted difficulties in obtaining dentist appointments. The Chair noted that it was possible to sign up to more than one dentist and that this was different to GPs.

Officers noted that there were several ways for young people to go about arranging prescriptions.

The young people asked and officers clarified that folic acid was a vitamin that helped to produce blood cells.

	<p>Officers noted the Local Offer to Care Leavers and that improving promotion of this was ongoing.</p> <p>It was noted that an FAQ on health questions could be produced. It was further noted that the Transitions Nurse could assist with this. The young people noted that they may also be able to assist with this; and that it was good to have a Transitions Nurse.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Panel noted the contents of the verbal update.</p>
23.	<p>ENHANCING OUR APPROACH TO THE REDUCTION OF CRIMINALISATION AMONG LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS (<i>Agenda Item 7</i>)</p> <p>Officers introduced the report into the approach to reducing the criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers.</p> <p>There were 324 Looked After Children in Hillingdon, of which 13 were known to the Youth Justice Service. Of these 13, eight were living in Hillingdon and five were living outside of the borough. Hillingdon retained the case management of these five.</p> <p>The London Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers Protocol was produced by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC). Benefits of this protocol included supporting Looked After Children within police stations and in custody. There was good partnership working between stakeholders, and there was a social worker who was the conduit between the Youth Justice Service and the Corporate Parenting team.</p> <p>On restorative justice, there was support in place for Care Leavers. Officers were also facilitating quarterly forums and providing training in 23 schools. Officers were working with care homes, specifically where there was suspected trauma. Officers noted that the Youth Justice Service was delivering a bespoke 'walking in our shoes' training.</p> <p>Members asked about 'dip sampling', and officers noted that this was where an incident log would be picked at random.</p> <p>Members asked about Polar Park (the report noted that officers were looking at improving children's experiences in police custody and were working towards a child-friendly custody suite at Polar Park). Officers noted that this was located in Heathrow. Members asked why there was a focus on this location, and officers and young people noted that it may be due to there being facilities for armed offences there, and that there were no custody suites at Uxbridge.</p> <p>Members noted that the voice of the child was important, especially when numbers were low (i.e. 13 Looked After Children known to the Youth Justice Service). It was further noted that young people who became looked after may have already been in contact with the Youth Justice Service.</p> <p>The Chair suggested adding an item to the Work Programme on Youth Justice for January 2025.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Panel noted the contents of the report.</p>
24.	<p>UPDATE ON PATHWAYS PLANS (VERBAL UPDATE) (<i>Agenda Item 8</i>)</p>

Officers gave an update on Pathways Plans.

There were currently 608 care experienced young people (aged 18+). Pathway Plans were the main document for young people aged 15 years and 9 months up to 21. (Where the 'care plan' is the main document for looked after children, the pathways plan then takes over as the main document).

There were 347 active pathways plans. At the age of 21, there was no longer statutory provision, but young people could continue to have a pathway plan if they wish but it also would no longer have to follow a set format. There were 219 young people aged 21+ who had the option to have a pathway plan.

Before the age of 21, young people would be prepared for not having a named personal advisor, although one would be available through the duty service. Some young people did have a named personal advisor but this was on a case-by-case basis. It was noted that there were three-weekly drop-ins for those aged over 21. This all had the aim of encouraging independence.

The Chair noted that pathway plans had not recently been scrutinised enough by the Panel and requested a written report be added to the Work Programme for January 2025.

Officers noted that Ofsted inspectors spoke to some of the older young people, and that some personal advisors still met with the young people that they had previously worked with, which demonstrated the good relationship they had. Officers further noted that young people often kept in touch with personal advisors at milestones in their lives such as weddings.

Officers noted that they were expanding 'family group conferencing' to support care experienced young people.

RESOLVED: That the Panel noted the update.

25. **WORK PROGRAMME** (*Agenda Item 9*)

Members considered the work programme.

It was noted that the Children's Participation Team Manager would take over from the Principal Social Worker as the principal officer for the Corporate Parenting Panel. Members thanked and commended the Principal Social Worker for their work.

It was requested that the Annual Children's Safeguarding Partnership report take place in November.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Parenting Panel:

- 1. Considered the Work Programme;**
- 2. Added an item on Youth Justice to the Work Programme for January 2025; and**
- 3. Added a further item on Pathway Plans to the Work Programme for January 2025**

The meeting, which commenced at 5:30 pm, closed at 7:15 pm.

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