

Corporate Parent Committee

Thursday 14th December 2017 at 7:00pm

Horizons Centre, Hanwell

PRESENT: Councillors Bell (Chair), Dhami, Gulaid, Millican, Rai, Sharma and Walker.

ALSO PRESENT: Marcella Phelan (Assistant Director, Planning, Commissioning and Partnerships), Carol Yates (Operations Manager, Leaving Care and Looked After Children), Judith Finlay (Executive Director, Children, Adults and Public Health), Carolyn Fair (Interim Director, Children and Families), Bridie McDonagh (Virtual School Head Teacher), Gary Odle (Project Manager, Horizons Centre), Sally Obado (Senior Teacher, Ealing Virtual School), Janine Jenkinson (Democratic Services Officer), Foster Carers and Young Persons Representatives.

**Please note attendance is based on those that have signed the attendance sheet.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received in advance of the meeting from Debbie Gabriel (Head of Childrens Placements and Support), and Councillor Midha.

2. Urgent Matters

There were none.

3. Matters to be Considered in Private

There were none.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

5. Minutes of the Meeting held on 19th October 2017

Councillors Sharma, Walker, and Gulaid said they had tendered their apologies ahead of the meeting, but they had not been recorded in the minutes.

Councillor Dhami said he had been present at the meeting, but his attendance had not been recorded in the minutes.

RESOLVED: That, subject to the amendments set out above, the minutes of the meeting held on 19th October 2017 be agreed as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

6. Update from Junior Council (Oral Update)

R, a Young Person's Representative, provided a presentation regarding the Letterbox Club. The Committee was informed that each child that enrolled in the Club received their own parcel of books, maths games, and stationery, once every month for six months, from May to October.

V explained that foster carers helped children read the books and play the maths games. The Senior Teacher, Ealing Virtual School explained that at training sessions foster carers were advised on how to engage children with the Letterbox parcels. There were six different coloured parcel sets for children in different year groups.

The Young People Representatives each explained how much they enjoyed receiving the Letterbox parcels.

7. Feedback from the Horizons ShoutOut Forum (Presentation and Oral Update)

L, J and M, Young People Representatives, told the Committee they had been undertaking some research in relation to the issue of care leavers and Council Tax exemption schemes, including the range of exemption schemes operated by other local authorities. L and J explained the financial difficulties faced by care leavers as they transitioned into adulthood, and moved to independent living.

The Young People Representatives had looked at the weekly cost of living for a care leaver and presented their findings to the Committee.

J explained that The Children's Society 'Wolf at the Door' report into Council Tax debt had shown that the pace of escalation of debt by local authorities could be frightening for care leavers and what initially started out for many care leavers as falling slightly behind could very quickly escalate to a court summons and enforcement action being taken.

M, a Young People Representative, reported that 52 local authorities across the country had introduced Council Tax exemption schemes for care leavers, including Birmingham City, Rochdale Council, Greenwich Council, Hammersmith and Fulham and Tower Hamlets. Work undertaken in respect of this proposal by Rochdale Council had found that 77% of their care leavers were behind with their Council Tax payments. Rochdale Council expected that the scheme would result in a decrease in emergency payments being made to care leavers in crisis as well as further reducing the dependency of these young people on other services.

J, explained that due to the high level of non payment, the income lost through the implementation of an exemption scheme, would be off set by the savings made on enforcement costs.

The Executive Director, Children, Adults and Public Health agree to consider the cost implications of a Council Tax exemption scheme for care leavers and to report findings back at the next meeting.

Councillor Bell thanked the Young People Representatives for their excellent work and agreed that the proposal for an exemption scheme should be given further consideration at the next Committee meeting.

There was some discussion about how an exemption scheme would apply to care leavers living out of borough.

It was noted that pre-tenancy training and financial education sessions were offered to care leavers as part of the leaving care programme.

The Committee thanked L, J and M for their report.

RESOLVED: Members agreed to discuss Council Tax exemption for care leavers at the next Corporate Parent Committee meeting.

8. My Education Mentors Project Update (Oral Update)

Z, M and N, Young People Representatives and mentors introduced the item.

M explained that mentors had recently provided out reach mentoring to pupils at William Perkins School and it was planned to offer mentoring to Greenford High pupils. One to one sessions were also available to young people unable to attend the sessions.

The Committee felt the outreach work in schools was an excellent initiative and thanked Z, M and N for the update.

RESOLVED: The Corporate Parent Committee noted the update.

9. Report on the Education of Looked After Children

The Virtual School Head Teacher introduced the report, and provided an analysis of the educational achievement of Ealing's Looked After Children and care leavers for the academic year 2016-17.

Members were informed that overall, there was a positive trend with student numbers at university increasing compared to the previous two years. As of September 2017, there were 46 students currently studying at university. In September 2017, 19 care leavers were eligible to start university, although 16 students had actually started their degree courses in their first year.

The Committee noted that in 2017 of the ten students who graduated from university, seven had graduated with first class degrees. The 2017 graduates had studied a wide variety of courses and achieved excellent pass rates. The number of graduates in 2017 was consistent with numbers compared to graduates in 2016.

The Committee noted that in 2016/17, five out of 45 students were studying at Russell Group universities.

There was some discussion regarding the routes students had taken to achieve university entrance qualifications and the grades they had achieved. It was noted that between 2014 and 2017, 26 students graduated with first class degrees. 13 of these students had achieved either Level 3 BTEC distinctions or A Level Grades A to C on entry into university. In contrast, 13 of these graduates achieved either BTEC pass grades, A Levels D to G or access qualifications on entry to university. Several of the young people had made significant progress upon graduation compared to their entry point at university. For example, 4 of the 7 students that graduated in 2017 achieved pass grades or A Level D to G grades upon entry to university and achieved a first class honours degree.

RESOLVED: The Corporate Parent Committee noted the report.

10. Corporate Parenting Principles

The Assistant Director Children's Services, Planning, Commissioning and Partnerships introduced the report that informed the Committee of changes in corporate parenting principles, including a requirement to publish a local offer to care leavers, and new responsibilities to extend support from local authority personal advisers to all care leavers up to the age of 25. In addition, there was a new requirement to expand the role of both designated teachers and Virtual School Heads, to include the provision of information and advice to certain previously looked after children and their families. It was anticipated that the new requirements would take effect from 1 April 2018.

The Committee was advised that information regarding any additional funding to support implementation of the new responsibilities had not yet been received. A consultation process had concluded and following this, the Department for Education was expected to publish more detailed guidance regarding the implementation shortly.

The Children and Social Work Act had received Royal Assent on 27 April 2017. Full implementation was expected from April 2018.

The new legislative duties included:

- Revised corporate parenting principles in relation to care and pathway planning.
- A local offer for care leavers.
- Extending support from local authority personal advisers to all care leavers up to age 25.
- Expanding the role of both the Virtual School Heads and the designated teachers to include the provision of information and advice to certain previously looked after children and their families.

The guidance emphasised the importance of the role local authorities played in looking after children, and indicated that Members should frequently ask themselves 'is this good enough for my children?' A strong ethos meant that everyone from the chief executive, elected members through to front line staff prioritised children's needs, and there was an embedded culture to support this across the council.

Section 3 of the Children and Social Work Act had introduced a new duty on local authorities to offer personal advisers to all care leavers up to age 25. Including those up to age 25 who had previously indicated they did not want a personal adviser. Support would be proactively offered to care leavers at least annually. It was anticipated that the new duty would take effect from 1 April 2018.

Officers were currently considering how best to deliver the new requirements with Horizons at the centre.

In addition, there were new requirements on the Virtual Head Teacher to extend and offer advice to new groups of children, including those on Special Guardianship Orders and adopted children not previously covered by the guidance. Ealing's Virtual Head Teacher had been considering how best to achieve this locally and had held discussions with designated teachers.

Consultation had recently concluded nationally on all the new legislation and further guidance to local authorities on implementation was expected shortly.

In the meantime, work was ongoing locally on implementation, consultation and involvement with the Children in Care Councils, on drawing up a local model and the local offer. A further report would be considered at the next Corporate Parent Committee in March 2018.

RESOLVED: The Corporate Parent Committee:

- I. noted the changes in corporate parenting responsibilities, as set out in the Children and Social Work Act 2017;**
- II. noted the requirement to publish a local offer and extend personal adviser support to all care leavers aged up to 25.**
- III. requested that officers consulted with the Children in Care Councils, and submitted further reports in March 2018 to the Committee, providing an update on progress regarding the local offer and implementation of the new requirements.**

11. Fostering Recruitment

The Operations Manager, Leaving Care and Looked After Children introduced the report, which provided an update regarding the current fostering recruitment activity, following on from the input of 'Impower' consultancy work and the implementation of the Brighter Futures new ways of working.

The Operations Manager, Leaving Care and Looked After Children explained that recruiting foster carers had been a challenge for many years and was an issue across the country, being especially difficult in London. Ealing Council had set a target of recruiting 84 carers over the three years from April 2015 to March 2018.

Research undertaken by the Fostering Network, (the national body leading on all aspects of fostering in the UK) into fostering recruitment patterns had consistently shown that on average, it took people three years to come forward to actively pursue their interest in fostering from the point of expressing an initial interest. The Council was in its third year of using the principles and learning from the 'Impower' project and the statistics were starting to indicate an increase in approvals.

The previous two years 2014-15 and 2016-17 had seen a large amount of recruitment activity, with ten new carers approved in each of these years. After a slow start, 2017-18 was starting to look more promising with current statistics showing the Council was on track to have 9 new carers approved by December 2017 and a likelihood of a final figure by 31 March 2018 of 15, which if achieved would represent a 50% increase in the approval rate.

There was some discussion regarding the use of digital platforms to promote recruitment. It was suggested that film footage of the recent Fostering and Adoption Awards evening could be used to promote recruitment. The Committee was advised that a film clip would be produced for use on the Council's website and in other promotional activities.

The Committee noted that it was important to take a broad approach to recruitment, as no one element was conclusively more successful than another. The importance of maintaining good communication links with enquirers was highlighted. Keeping in touch with previous enquirers was a key element of the Council's recruitment strategy.

RESOLVED: The Corporate Parent Committee noted the report.

12. Management Information Summary – Children Looked After

The Interim Director, Children and Families introduced the report, which provided an analysis on the April 2017 to October 2017 performance for children looked after and care leavers.

The use of performance indicators in assessing performance enabled the Council to evaluate its current performance, monitor improvements and inform

service development. Performance was reviewed monthly by operational service management and by the departmental senior management team.

The Committee noted that as at 31 October 2017, there were 341 children and young people looked after by Ealing Council, compared with 365 at the same time last year. This represented one of the lowest number of children looked after in 10 years.

RESOLVED: The Corporate Parent Committee noted the report.

13. Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled to be held on 22 March 2018.

Chair..... (Councillor Julian Bell)

The meeting ended at 8:00 p m.