

Corporate Parent Committee

Thursday 4th December 2014 at 7:00pm

Horizons Centre, Hanwell

PRESENT: Councillors Bell (Chair), Aslam, Camadoo, Gulaid, Kelly*, Midha, Millican, Rai

ALSO PRESENT: Judith Finlay (Director, Children and Families), Marcella Phelan (Assistant Director, Children and Families), Bridie McDonagh (Head of Behaviour Strategy and Inclusion & Virtual School Head LAC), Carol Yates (Operations Manager, Looked After Children and Leaving Care Team), Carolyn Fair (Operations Manager – Children’s Placement Services), Gary Odle (Manager, Horizons Centre), Ivan Yiga (EMPAC Project Officer and HSC Lead), Jude Fraser (Horizons Centre), Sundeep Gill (Post-16 Teacher LACET), Joseph Anstee (Democratic Services Officer), Mark Meehan (Assistant Director, Housing Demand) (Part) and Young Peoples Representatives

*Replaced Councillor Dhami for this meeting only – 4/12/14.

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

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Dhami and David Archibald (Executive Director, Children and Adults).

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 18th September 2014

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 18th September 2014 be agreed as a true and correct record.

6. Update from Junior Council (Verbal Update)

There had been 2 meetings of the new Junior Council so far. The Junior Council was promoting the themes of friendship and community care, and finding ways to encourage communication with foster parents. In one session the young people made puppets and used them in roleplaying dialogues about relationships in care. Junior Council members had met with Care Managers to discuss issues, and young people were urged to discuss their problems with their social workers in order to find solutions. One current issue

was the length of time it was taking to have school trip forms signed. Officers would look into delegating this responsibility to foster parents in the future. The Committee thanked the Junior Council representatives for their confident and informative presentation.

7. Feedback from the Horizons ShoutOut Forum (Verbal Update)

Ivan Yiga, EMPAC Project Officer and HSC Lead, introduced this item. The ShoutOut Forum was promoting opportunities to debate and discuss issues, and was pursuing its four manifesto points of Savings, long-term accommodation, apprenticeships and Staying Put legislation. The representatives from HSC gave a presentation on their four manifesto points. L, Young People's Representative, spoke about Savings. Horizons ShoutOut Forum was campaigning for a long-term savings policy, as some young people were leaving care without any money. The presentation highlighted the practice of saving at source long-term savings for young people in foster care. The HSC had identified two local authorities in Bexley London Borough and Solihull Metropolitan Borough that had adopted this policy, which applies to in-house foster carers and independent fostering agencies. The ShoutOut Forum had been researching and having discussions with numerous authorities to find a suitable policy for the Borough to adopt. The local authority was looking at implementing change with in-house foster carers, but due to the impact of agencies and the West London Alliance, it was difficult to adjust policies surrounding Savings.

D, Young People's Representative, spoke about the issue of apprenticeships, which was also discussed at the previous meeting. The ShoutOut Forum had done a case study comparing apprentices with University students, and found that apprentices were left with significantly less money after buying essentials. The issue of financial support was putting young people off entering into apprenticeships. Carol Yates, Operations Manager, Looked After Children and Leaving Care Team, stated that the Authority was agreeing further top-ups and clothing allowances for apprentices, and hoped to have changes agreed by March. There were currently 37 young people at University compared with 12 in apprenticeships, although this figure could be higher if more support could be given to apprentices.

The two issues were considered to be very important at that moment, as young people needed to be secure in their independence. Officers were confident that the problems around apprenticeships could be resolved by March but were less confident about the long-term Savings policy, as the issue was complicated, and difficult for the finance department. However every effort was to be made to try to come to a solution.

The Committee thanked L and D for their research and presentation.

8. My Education Mentors Project Update (Verbal Update)

R, lead Mentor, introduced this item. The Mentors project had organised numerous sessions since October and had good experience and feedback to share. W and A, two new Mentors, gave a presentation on the Mentors project. W was studying Hospitality at college and working for charity APPLE.

W joined mentoring to further his understanding and had found the project enjoyable, particularly enjoying that the project made a direct impact on young people.

A attended Queen Mary University, graduating with a 1st class Maths degree, and joined the Mentors project having been impressed by seeing the project in action previously. The aim of the project was to help mentees, listen to their problems, to make every session enjoyable and to help mentees develop aspirations for the future.

R read a slide on behalf of N, a mentee. N joined the project as it was a good opportunity to talk to someone. N had really enjoyed the sessions and activities, and thought the project felt like bonding amongst a family. Recent sessions had included a launch party, table tennis, rollerblading and a trip to Brunel University, and the sessions had received positive comments and feedback from both mentors and mentees. Mentors set targets for their mentees and vice versa, and there was a focus on encouragement and advice. Sessions had already been planned for December until March and included a Christmas meal, ice skating and a trip to Ealing & West London college to learn about media.

The Committee thanked R, W and A for their excellent presentation.

9. Report on the Education of Looked After Children

Bridie McDonagh, Head of Behaviour Strategy and Inclusion & Virtual School Head LAC, introduced this report, informing members of the details for Post-16 education results in the last academic year and providing information on the current year 12 and year 13 groups. There were no Key Stage results to report at this stage of the academic year. Activity Week during half-term had been very busy following new funding, and activities had included music workshops and lessons, a day trip to Cambridge University, and a day out in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Sundeep Gill, Post-16 Teacher LACET, updated the Committee on graduates and University entrants. There were 8 graduates in the last academic year, 6 undergraduates and 2 postgraduates. There were 37 LAC students currently studying at University, with more than 10 in their first year. This makes up 15% of the care leaver group, up from 14% the previous year.

Education Results 16-18

In Year 12 there were 33 students last year. This number was down on previous years, but reflected a complex year group. Most of the students were at college, many studying practical courses. The overall figures for Year 13 were consistent with previous years, and the percentage of young people in study was maintained, with 69%. Practical courses remained popular, with 19 of the 49 Year 13 students studying for BTECs, NVQs or City & Guilds.

Currently there were 50 students in Year 12, and 76% of students who took GCSEs last year were still in education. Graduates were given support in all their endeavours after finishing University, and all 7 of the graduates in 2013

had been able to find employment in graduate positions. There was an increasing number of high quality qualifications, and an increasing number of postgraduates in the Borough.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

10. Adoption Figures Briefing

Carolyn Fair, Operations Manager – Children’s Placement Services, introduced the report, briefing the Committee on the interim Adoption figures for 2014/15. The Borough had approved 13 adopters so far in this financial year, and hoped to have approved 30 by the end of the financial year. The Borough had approved 9 adoption orders so far in this financial year and hoped to have approved 15 by the end of the financial year. There had been 2 significant appeals in court which had affected adoption numbers, and there were a number of other changes in the landscape to adjust to, as there were changes to Special Guardianship Orders, and the numbers of Residence Orders and care proceedings had gone up. However, the changes were quantifiable and data was always being tracked.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

11. Accommodation for Young People Leaving Care

Marcella Phelan, Assistant Director, Children and Families, introduced the report, updating the Committee on the accommodation needs of care leavers. There was a range of accommodation in the Borough, and the best solution was sought for every care leaver, despite increasing financial complexities. Traditionally, a care leaver moved into Quota Housing, 60 places of which were pre-allocated for them, and this figure was currently a suitable amount. However, the number of properties available was reduced this year due to redevelopment work on estates and other ongoing work. The added pressures and demand meant Housing was currently consulting on a plan for future years.

Mark Meehan, Assistant Director, Housing Demand, explained that 10, 000 applicants registered with the Council were chasing 800 properties, and so only around 1 in 10 applicants could be housed, with 9 remaining on the waiting list. Consultations were ongoing ahead of a future Cabinet report, and any necessary changes to policy would be recommended. Working with the private sector was a potential option. The department’s intention was always to house as many care leavers as possible, through all possible avenues.

The Committee discussed the possibility of care leavers entering into house shares. There were contrasting views on the matter. There were examples of local authorities that offered such a service, and the Housing department had relations with private landlords in the Borough. Although it would not be suitable for all care leavers, the option would be appreciated, and social workers could recommend if house sharing was or was not suitable for an individual.

It was confirmed that the 36 care leavers currently waiting for accommodation would be housed in the current financial year. It could take up to 4 months for care leavers to gain a place in Quota Housing, but the local authority guaranteed not to close the case of a care leaver until accommodation had been found. Comments on the ongoing consultation were welcomed ahead of the deadline on 20th February 2015.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

12. Proposal to the Department of Education Innovation Programme

Marcella Phelan introduced this report, highlighting Ealing's proposal to the Department of Education Innovation Programme. The decision on whether Ealing's Innovation bid was to be publically announced in the near future. If successful it was believed that Ealing could tackle significant issues. There were not enough approved local fosterers in the Borough, and better support was needed for the existing ones. If the bid was successful the Borough could recruit more carers, give better training and support and focus on better support for young people. The Borough wanted to pilot delegating more powers to carers, hoped to engage with young people better in order to improve outcomes, and hoped to target young people on the edge of care, providing more intensive support. Although currently recruitment was not meeting the Borough target, performance in recruitment was stable and better than neighbouring Boroughs.

If the bid was successful it would provide funding for the remainder of this financial year and for the next financial year. If the project was successful in its aims it would become self-financing, as the Borough's resources would be used more efficiently, for instance by virtue of fewer children coming into care and fewer children being relocated. A regular report on progress in this area would be delivered to the Committee. It was also agreed that a report on the impact of budget changes on young people should be prepared for the next meeting of Corporate Parent Committee.

RESOLVED: i) That the report be noted.
ii) That a regular report on the Innovation Programme will be given to Corporate Parent Committee.
iii) That an analysis of budget changes in this area would be prepared for the Corporate Parent Committee meeting on Thursday 19th March 2015.

13. Social Services Complaints Report on Looked After Children

Judith Finlay, Director, Children and Families, introduced this report, providing information on complaints for Looked After Children for the period July 2014 to September 2014. It was a satisfactory period in the area, when there were 9 complaints made. 3 complaints were upheld, 6 were not upheld, all complaints received were responded to within the statutory requirements, and no complaints proceeded past Stage 1.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

14. Management Information Summary – Looked After Children

Judith Finlay introduced this report, providing a brief analysis on the April 2014 to September 2014 performance indicators (2014/15 year) for Looked After Children and care leavers. Performance in respect of the key indicators had been good during the period and there were no particular issues to report. The number of children and young people in care had decreased since the start of this financial year.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

15. Date of the Next Meeting

The date of the next Corporate Parent Committee meeting is Thursday 19th March 2015.

The Chair thanked everybody for attending, thanked the young people for their contribution to the meeting, and wished everybody involved with the Committee a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Chair..... (Councillor Julian Bell)

The meeting ended at 9:05pm.