

Corporate Parent Committee

Thursday 21st March 2019 at 7:00pm

Horizons Centre, Hanwell

PRESENT: Councillors: Bell (Chair), Johnson (Vice-Chair), Driscoll, Rooney, Sharma and Millican.

Councillor Midha was substituted by Councillor Jammu.

ALSO PRESENT: Marcella Phelan (Assistant Director, Planning, Commissioning and Partnerships), Judith Finlay (Executive Director, Children, Adults and Public Health), Carolyn Fair (Director, Children and Families), Debbie Gabriel (Head of Service, Safeguarding & Support), Bridie McDonagh (Virtual School Head Teacher), Charles Barnard (Head of Early Years and SAFE 0-18, Planning Commissioning & Partnerships), Carol Yates (Operations Manager, Looked After Children and Leaving Care Team), Gary Odle (Horizons Project Care Leavers Manager), Jude Fraser (Children and Families, Senior Management Team (SMT), Horizons Centre), Sue Tarry (Behaviour and Inclusion Team), Sian Hender (Behaviour & Social Inclusion Team), Cornelia Harding (Democratic Services Officer) and Young Persons Representatives.

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

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Block, Councillor Midha (substituted) and Ian Jenkins.

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 13th December 2018

RESOLVED: That, the minutes of the meeting held on 13th December 2018 be agreed as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

6. Matters Arising from the Minutes

There were none.

7. Update from Junior Council (Verbal Update)

Representatives from the Junior Council took it in turns to update the Committee. They informed the meeting that the theme for Junior Council meetings this year has been 'transition.' This was particularly relevant as a number of the children would be starting secondary school in September 2019. Some former Junior Council members had been invited to share their experiences and give some advice on starting secondary school to the younger ones. The younger children had had lots of questions and they had been pleased that the older children had given up some of their time to help them and had even written some information down for them.

The Junior Council representatives acknowledged that this was Marcella Phelan (Assistant Director) last meeting as she was retiring from Ealing and they thanked her for her work over the years and presented her with some flowers.

Sue Tarry, from the Behaviour and Inclusion Team, then gave a presentation which gave an overview of the history of Junior Council and the Virtual School; both of which were initiatives led by Marcella. Marcella had also initiated mentoring in 2005, as part of the Aim Higher project.

Some of the highlights of the activities the children had benefitted from over the years in Junior Council included: Green Bags containing stationery and learning materials, a flyer about friendship and sleepovers, a display board for social workers and their managers and creating their own 'memory folders' which were presented at a Westminster conference with Ann Longfield, the Children's Commissioner. Some children from Junior Council had been on the cover of Who Cares Magazine and some had been interviewed for the Letterbox 15th anniversary film.

Marcella had also been instrumental in setting up the Horizons Centre, initially as a smaller Drop In Centre at Mattock Lane Children's Home. This gave children and young people the opportunity to learn skills such as cooking and budgeting, which would be useful when they became care leavers and/or went to university and develop their talents in arts and music and make friends and have their voices heard.

Through Horizons, the children had enjoyed several outings such as visits to Parliament, meeting Esther Rantzen (who set up ChildLine) and Ann Longfield Children's Commissioner. Other highlights included increased support for employment and training through the Connexions Service, visits to Kew Gardens and the Annual Education Awards, in place for over 20 years. Ealing Horizons Centre has also been nationally acclaimed by Ministers and won many Awards including winning the MJ Awards 2017 for Best Children's Service.

Sue, the young people and all present at the meeting acknowledged that Marcella had 'put Ealing on the map.' It was noted that Marcella had received an MBE in the Queen's Honours list in 2018 for her work with children and young people.

Senior Council

A young person from the Senior Council also expressed thanks to Marcella. He noted that the Horizons Centre provided help and support to young people concerning education, employment, housing and other areas. Just as importantly, it was a safe space for young people to come together and share ideas, concerns and successes.

At this point, Bridie McDonagh said that she had been at the Virtual School Heads Together National Conference in Manchester earlier that day; she said such events made her reflect on the impact Marcella had had in advocating for better education opportunities for children and young people in care nationally that had been taken up through policy and legislation by the DfE and had had an impact way beyond Ealing.

The young people from the senior council presented Marcella with a bouquet of flowers.

Marcella thanked everyone for their lovely words. She said that the projects she had been involved in had been creative and innovative as they had listened to and reflected the young people's ideas and the impact of other talented staff. She said that Ealing had done its bit in making sure that life for care leavers and young people in care improved and that they can access the support they needed.

The Chair and Leader of the Council, Julian Bell, expressed appreciation to Marcella and said she had been an inspiration; she had provided stability and given the children and young people the vision to aim higher.

RESOLVED:

The Corporate Parent Committee noted the update; thanked and commended Marcella.

8. Feedback from Horizons Shout-Out Council (HSC) (Verbal feedback)

Representatives from the HSC informed the Committee that the Local Offer document had been sent to all care leavers. It outlined the support they can receive from the Leaving Care Service, including the After Care Service at Horizons. A young person, 'L', informed the Committee that their next meeting was scheduled for April [2019]. The young person mentioned that the council tax exemption was welcomed following the Wolf at the Door report, published by the Children's Society.

The young people of the HSC were concerned about the short time-span for the council tax exemption to come into operation and the lack of awareness among care leavers about how and where to go to apply for this. The young people said they had researched how other councils had implemented the council tax exemption for care leavers and they wanted to make the following recommendations to Ealing Council:

- The main Ealing Council website should include a link to a council tax exemption page for care leavers, informing them how to apply;
- The HSC to write to all eligible young people informing them about the council tax exemption;
- Those about to turn 25 years old should get a reminder letter confirming the end of their eligibility for the council tax exemption.

The young people said they valued the Horizons Centre as a 'safe space for care leavers'. It offered opportunities such as Listening Space sessions at which topics such as: universal credit, social media as an influencer, family support networks, the meaning of Brexit, parenting responsibilities and supporting ex-care leavers had been discussed. A manager from the Youth Justice Service had attended the first meeting and some of the subjects discussed had been Brexit, homelessness, universal credit and employment opportunities.

Topics planned for the next meeting included: the dos and don'ts of housing for care leavers with staff from the housing solutions department. It was intended that the discussion would be developed into a podcast to inform care leavers about the issues and solutions.

Carol Yates said that on 2nd April 2019, herself and Gary would be meeting the Council Tax Support Team. They intended to produce a document to explain how to apply for the council tax exemption and the discounted Leisure Pass. It was hoped that this document would be available by 9th April. Judith Finlay added that the team would ensure that this document was communicated to all care leavers so that they do not get into financial difficulties.

Councillor Johnson said it was an idea to put this information on the website. Carolyn Fair said it may not happen immediately, but they would look into it.

Carol Yates said there was some debate about having boxes on the Leisure Pass application form where young people could indicate CL or LAC, as this might make some young people feel self-conscious.

RESOLVED:
The Corporate Parent Committee noted the feedback.

9. My Education Mentors Project

The My Education Mentors Project were not in attendance at this evening's Corporate Parent Committee meeting.

10. Report on the Education of Looked After Children

Bridie McDonagh presented her report; she gave an overview of the proportion of children that had achieved their targets in exams at Key Stages 1, 2 and 4. Bridie highlighted that the current Year 11 group had a big cohort with Educational Health & Social Plans (EHCP) and there were several children in special schools.

Bridie went on to speak about the current Year 12 (Key Stage 4) figures. She said this reflected that some children were coming into care late and therefore they may not achieve as much. Bridie said the team were also concerned that young people got appropriate support at the post-16 level.

Bridie noted that there were currently 48 young people (17% of care leavers) studying at university; of which one had graduated in January 2019 and another had deferred his place for September 2019. Bridie said it was expected that eight students would graduate with either a first class degree or a post-graduate degree this autumn and that 13 young people would be going to university in the autumn of 2019.

RESOLVED:

- **The Corporate Parent Committee noted the report.**
- **With respect to the request raised at the last meeting that the Virtual School Head Teacher provide information on Year 9 progress by Key Stage 4, this action has proved to be more challenging than anticipated in the discussion due to the lack of national assessment data and the range of assessment methods and also that some schools are have started teaching GCSE at Year 9 and even Year 8. The VS are currently looking at Year 11 to provide an alternative case study model to highlight progress from Year 9 to KS4.**

11. Adoption Figures Briefing & Update on the RAA

Debbie Gabriel reported that the figures for adoption in the April 2018 to March 2019 year were low as only a few children had been placed. Adoption is a very specialised service and only appropriate for certain children where it is in their best interest.

Debbie said that going forward, the Education & Adoption Act 2016 required local authorities to combine their adoption services into Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) by April 2020. 23 London boroughs were part of Adopt London. The West London RAA would be comprised of Brent, Ealing, Hounslow and Hammersmith & Fulham. The aim of this legislation would be

to strengthen adoption support services and to ensure that it is not a postcode lottery, making the right support available to adopters and to children in the future.

Councillor Johnson said that it was anticipated that Ealing Adoption Services would have a strong presence at the Future Ealing event in the summer and that this would help to recruit more potential adopters.

It was noted at the meeting that there was a conflict between getting children to stay with their birth families or being placed for adoption. Councillor Jammu wanted to find out how Ealing's track record of placing children for adoption compared with other boroughs.

Debbie replied that the trend across London was that there were fewer children seeking adoption and few adopters. She suggested that this could partly be due to the view of the London courts, which encouraged children to stay with their birth families. Debbie said the picture nationally was different and that high level discussions are taking place with the Courts to review this approach.

RESOLVED:
The Corporate Parent Committee noted the report.

12. Fostering Update

This report followed on from the fostering recruitment report presented to the committee in June 2018 and provided data for the past ten years' activity. Debbie Gabriel informed the Committee that recruiting foster carers in Ealing has continued to be a challenge this year as nationally and especially in London. In the 2018-19 year the LBE service would have approved 7 new foster carers, amongst the lowest numbers in the past ten years.

With the setting up of the RAA, it was anticipated that the service would be able to tackle fostering recruitment in a regionalised way through joint or collaborative recruitment. Debbie stated that it was possible that a report would be taken to cabinet if it was decided that more formal collaboration was needed later.

Councillor Rooney said she had heard about the possibility of local authorities offering support to families to increase the size of their home in order to be able to foster. She wondered whether such schemes were being considered in Ealing. Debbie replied that she was aware of this scheme which was being promoted by the Greater London Authority and by Cornerstone and Ealing were considering it.

Debbie said however for such a scheme to work, clear criteria about who would be eligible would need to be agreed. For example, it could apply where having another bedroom would mean that a carer(s) could take on a sibling group and therefore the money would be invested to convert a property.

Councillor Bell noted that the Ealing Fostering service were not yet able to tweet about opportunities. Debbie said that they were currently making announcements fortnightly through Facebook. Councillor Bell and other persons present noted that Gurdwaras and other places of worship were currently being approached. Debbie said the service was also working with primary and secondary schools and attended parents' evenings.

RESOLVED:

The Corporate Parent Committee noted the report.

**13. Social Services Complaints Report on Looked After Children
(1st October 2018 to 31st December 2018)**

Judith Finlay spoke to Heather Dickie's report. During the period 5 Stage 1 complaints had been made by or in respect of Children Looked After. None of these complains have been upheld. The remaining one was still outstanding due to it being a complex complaint.

RESOLVED:

The Corporate Parent Committee noted the report.

14. Management Information Summary - Children Looked After- Dec 2018

Carolyn Fair spoke to Mary Umrigar's report which provided a brief analysis on the April 2018 to December 2018 performance for Children Looked After (CLA), child protection and care leavers.

Carolyn reported that the numbers of Looked After Children had increased. However, the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan had reduced in comparison to last year's figures and was one of the lowest in the last five years.

Carolyn continued that in the current cohort of care leavers, 59% of all care leavers were in education, employment or training. Broken by DfE age categories; 17-18 year olds, 89.7% are in EET and 51.8% of 19-21 year olds. These figures were better than or equal to the statistical neighbours and national comparators.

The meeting was informed that a further OFSTED Inspection was imminent. It was anticipated that a self-evaluation assessment would be brought to a Corporate Parent meeting in due course.

RESOLVED:

- **The Corporate Parent Committee noted the report.**
- **That the Authority's Ofsted self-evaluation assessment be brought to a future Corporate Parent Committee for consideration.**

15. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting is Thursday 27th June 2019.

Chair..... (Councillor Julian Bell)

The meeting ended at 7:46pm