

Corporate Parent Committee

Thursday 15th October 2020 at 6:00pm

PRESENT: Councillors: Bell (Chair), Johnson (Vice-Chair), Cox, Midha, Rooney, Sharma, Block (substitute for Driscoll) and Millican.

ALSO PRESENT: Judith Finlay (Executive Director, Children, Adults and Public Health), Carolyn Fair (Director, Children and Families), Bridie McDonagh (Virtual School Head Teacher), Carol Yates (Operations Manager LAC and LCT), Charles Barnard (Assistant Director Integrated Early Years, Preventative and Youth Services), Gary Odle (Horizons Project Care Leavers Manager), Jude Fraser (Children and Families, Senior Management Team (SMT), Horizons Centre), Debbie Gabriel (Head of Service, Adopt London West), Gary Jones (Assistant Director, Children's Social Care), Jeevan Matharu (Participation Project Worker, Horizons), Misha Jalil (Democratic Services Officer) and Young Persons Representatives.

1. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Councillor Block substituted for Councillor Driscoll.

Apologies were received from Julie Lewis, Director Learning, Standards and School Partnerships.

2. Urgent Matters

There were none.

3. Matters to be Considered in Private

There were none.

4. Declaration of Interests

There were none.

5. Minutes

Resolved that: the minutes of the meeting on 25 June 2020 be agreed as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

6. Update from Junior Council

Bridie McDonagh, Virtual School Head Teacher informed the Committee that Junior Council are not present and they do not attend at this time of the year

as the first meeting of the Council had not occurred yet. However, there will be representation from this group at the next meeting.

Resolved that: there will be an update from Junior Council at the next meeting.

7. Feedback from the Horizons ShoutOut Forum

Gary Odle, Horizons Project Care Leavers Manager informed the Committee that they ensured services were fully compliant with Covid-19 risk assessments and guidance. The centre was deep cleaned, sanitary facilities were installed, staff risk assessments were completed and there was regular contact with colleagues across the service to maintain the support network during Covid-19.

Gary Odle reported on the activities over the last quarter. Key support was delivered to young people via Microsoft Teams and Skype. Consultations and group sessions were available to young people. Face-to-face visits were arranged for those receiving support from the Leaving Care team. The helpline was in operation so young people had access to help and guidance. Food parcels and laptops were distributed. The centre shared key information with young people using digital communication and social media to stay in touch and to advertise opportunities in education, training and employment.

The Officer stated that the Horizon ShoutOut Forum kept their voice authentic, relevant and current through their newsletter which was distributed to all care leavers. The most recent newsletter focussed on building communities and informing young people about the changing landscape in terms of Covid-19 guidelines and services available via the Leaving Care team.

Clarissa, a university student who was an editor and contributor to the newsletter, informed the Committee that she wrote a piece in their recent newsletter regarding starting or returning to university and covered topics such as attendance and student finance. Due to the pandemic, the newsletter contributors decided to produce an information sheet for students on: accommodation issues and concerns; virtual one-to-one support; and consultation phone calls. She reported that she will team up with other newsletter contributors to contact university students to offer support, guidance and make them aware that the Horizon and Leaving Care service can assist them.

Jeevan Matharu, Participation Project Worker, Horizons informed the Committee that they delivered an Arts Award over the summer period. She explained that this was an accredited programme. The programme replaced the usual summer activities which could not be delivered due to the pandemic. The Arts Award ran through the Summer Arts College by Unitas, with some sessions taking place online. Young people participating in the programme produced amazing art, photography, drawings and poetry. It was a good way

for the young people to choose and develop an art form. The participants could also watch online exhibitions and films and discuss their feedback. The young people were able to present their work and discuss their progress. She stated that the programme was a success and a few of the young people achieved a Bronze Award and were working towards the Silver level which is equivalent to GCSE level.

Jeevan Matharu informed the Committee that they carried out doorstep visits to deliver the supplies required to take part in the Arts Award, which included workbooks, Amazon vouchers and tablets. The tablets and vouchers were provided by Unitas.

Angel and Chenal, two young people who had participated in the Arts Award were at the meeting. Angel informed the Committee that she enjoyed taking part in the programme because it made her express her artistic side. Chenal reported that the programme also helped her discover her creative side as she learned about new art forms, such as haiku. The arts exhibition increased her confidence and she made new friends.

Jude Fraser, Children and Families, Senior Management Team (SMT), Horizons Centre informed the Committee about the employment webinar hosted by the centre. The government is offering a 12 month paid internship across various departments across the civil service to care leavers. To promote the Civil Service Care Leavers Internship scheme, a webinar took place on Monday, 28th September 2020. It was supported by two former care leavers who are currently taking part in the internship. During the webinar, the two former care leavers assisted by answering questions relating to: the internship itself, their experience so far within the civil service; civil service expectation of interns; interview panel; application process; and progression. Jude Fraser commented that the young people found it very useful and informative and therefore they aim to continue to offer more employment webinars. They are scheduled to meet with the Apprenticeship Team to discuss more opportunities for care leavers.

Gary Odle introduced Yassin, another young person who took part in a workshop with Councillor Rooney. Yassin informed the Committee that he lives in Acton and it was useful to find out more about his local councillor's role. He found out how she became a councillor and received advice relevant to those who are interested in a career in politics. Yassin stated that they do not often get the opportunity to speak to councillors and therefore he was pleased to be able to speak to Councillor Rooney and thanked her for the experience. Yassin stated he wanted more councillors to take part in similar workshops in future.

In response to a question by the Committee, Jude Fraser responded that the Civil Service Care Leavers Internship is the only scheme, at present, that is aimed specifically at care leavers. However, other employers are looking into running similar schemes and within the next 12 months there should be other opportunities for care leavers by businesses. Jude Fraser also informed the

Committee that 9 young people had applied to the internship offered by the Civil Service for 2020. They are likely to learn if any of the young people have been shortlisted by late November 2020. The Officer reported that 4 young people secured a paid internship under last year's scheme, with 2 working within the Department for Education; 1 working within the Treasury; and 1 working within the Ministry of Justice.

Gary Odle stated that the next employment webinar is with the Apprenticeship Team and the topic of discussion will be the Kickstart Scheme.

The Chair thanked the young people present at the meeting for sharing their experiences. The young people exited the meeting at this point.

Resolved that: the Committee noted the update.

8. My Education Mentors Project Update

Resolved that: there was no update on this item.

9. Survey on our Young People Interim Update

Carol Yates, Operations Manager LAC and LCT provided a brief verbal update on the survey. She stated that the closing date for the Equalities Survey is on 16 October 2020 and 32 people have completed the survey to date. She anticipated more responses as they have recently advertised the survey again via a newsletter. The responses so far provide very rich information with personal experiences from young people about their interaction with partner agencies such as: the police; health; and education. The Officer stated that she should have a full update to report at the next meeting.

Resolved that: the Committee noted the interim update and that there will be a full update at the next meeting.

10. Care Leavers Independent Accommodation Report

Carol Yates explained that the purpose of the report was to provide the Committee with an update on the progress of the work to increase the independent accommodation opportunities to care leavers.

The Officer outlined the context of some of the difficulties for the young people. Care leavers move onto independent accommodation at the average age of 18 which is 7 years earlier than the average age non-care leavers move to independent accommodation. Landlords want guarantors and they do not want young people on benefits as tenants. Care-leavers are competing for accommodation with professionals. It is expensive to rent in London. Young people have experienced trauma and require support to hold a tenancy. They

have also experienced landlords making instant judgements about their age, ethnicity and gender when they are viewing property at which point they suddenly get turned down.

The Officer reported that Councillors Bell, Johnson and Millican were overseeing the progress officers have been making in terms of increasing housing opportunities for care leavers. It was agreed that there would be a Quota Housing Panel chaired by Mark Wiltshire, Director of Community Development and Carolyn Fair, Director Children and Families. It was also agreed that a review of the progress of the 19/20 quota allocations needed to take place as there were still young people who had not acquired quota properties.

The Officer explained that some of the challenges to providing social housing was due to the Council's Regeneration Programme. As part of the programme, many tenants were decanted whilst their properties were being refurbished. This significantly decreased the numbers of social housing properties available in 19/20 and 20/21 for vulnerable groups, including care leavers. Another challenge was the recent pandemic as Housing's comprehensive response to those who were vulnerable and homeless reduced the number of opportunities for housing for young people. Moreover, during lockdown landlords were understandably reluctant to allow viewings so there was reduced opportunity in the private market.

In terms of the Quota Panel, the Officer reported that there have been 3 Panels to date and 12 young people's cases have been agreed to go through to quota. The applications were reviewed very quickly and there is a new way of assessing applications to allow a better understanding between housing and social care.

The Officer reported on the progress on last year's applications. There were 18 applications agreed but only 6 had acquired a tenancy. However, in the last 4 months an additional 8 young people secured a tenancy bringing the total to 14. There are 4 young people currently bidding for properties at the offer point.

The Officer explained that the Leaving Care Team have started providing 2 month's rent and the deposit. Previously they had provided 1 month's rent and the deposit. The increased provision made a difference to landlords as they had more trust in the young people. This enabled 10 young people to secure housing independently.

The Officer drew the Committee's attention to page 15 of the agenda and summarised the information in the table which outlined the number of care leavers in each accommodation. She explained that the 12 people in NRPF accommodation had a positive impact on their budget. She further added that the 87 young people waiting for accommodation was a big risk.

The Officer spoke about the feedback from the Care Leaver Survey in April/May 2020. Young people felt less supported in semi-independent

accommodation. They were struggling to afford rent in private accommodation and felt they could no longer live in the borough. The rent affordability issue was compounded by some people's inability to do part time work over lockdown and some have lost their part-time positions. Young people wanted social housing to be provided to all care leavers which is what is seen in other boroughs. However, there was positive feedback from those who had moved into the private rented projects as they valued living in the smaller community.

The Officer spoke about the ongoing actions already being taken to meet social housing needs. They will continue to present cases to the Quota Panel. Personal Advisors in the Leaving Care Team and After Care will continue to support young people in looking for private rented opportunities and the increased rent/deposit scheme will remain. The young people in the shared private rented scheme have been able to take over their tenancies having demonstrated that they are good tenants. The Council will offer more properties to do same kind of projects with and 2 shared private rented schemes are opening this month.

The Officer estimated that £750,000 of cost savings could have been made from the leaving care placements budget if housing opportunities were provided to the 87 young people without social housing. She further added that there were additional cost implications incurred by having to use more expensive placements for young people as the lower cost placements were blocked by those who had no accommodation to move onto. Therefore, the young people coming through the system will be using more expensive, smaller accommodation that is further out of the borough.

The Committee commented that it is not helpful to compare Ealing to other boroughs at present due to our regeneration programme which reduces the number of properties available to young people. The Committee also thanked the officers for their hard work and for the progress in this area.

Resolved that: the Committee noted the contents of the Care Leavers Independent Accommodation Report.

11. Ealing Children's Services Ofsted Inspection of Children's Social Care Services

Gary Jones, Assistant Director for Children's Social Care explained the purpose of the report was to note: the improvements against the Ofsted Improvement Plan; the outcome of the of the Ofsted Annual Engagement Meeting; and Ofsted's regulatory approach to impending ILACS focused visits.

The Officer reported some of the priority actions taken by the Council in response to the November 2019 inspection:

- A lot of progress was made across Children's Services and there was additional funding to enhance capacity for frontline services.
- An improvement plan was drafted for the front door which supported: improvements in decision making; effectively responding to demand at the front door; multi-agency working; and our domestic abuse response.
- A raft of practice guidance was issued for social workers and they were being supported in their approach in working with children and families.
- The Officer explained that he will be chairing a strategic stakeholders board which will work closely with partner agencies to effectively respond to the demand at the front door service and to continue to drive improvements with decision making for children in need and at risk of harm.
- Front line managers received training delivered by an external consultant.
- Regular auditing activity carried out by senior officers continued to inform learning and approach to developing the workforce.
- In terms of the management oversight and challenge by Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's), the standards for the service have been revised and some adjustments have been made in terms of IRO's escalation service.
- In terms of performance reporting, there is effective utilisation of data so managers respond to demand and they understand the service delivery.
- In terms of risk of homelessness and children on the edge of care, Legal Panels are chaired by a designated Head of Service which ensures that there is a consistent application of threshold for children where the Local Authority decides to issue care proceedings to safeguard children.

The Officer reported on The Social Care Annual Engagement Meeting with Ofsted which took place on the 3rd September via Teams. The Council shared a self-evaluation of the quality and impact of its practice with children and families with Ofsted. This was discussed at the meeting. The inspectors found the self-assessment clear and well-presented and it provided a good overview of current performance and plans for Children's Services. The Ofsted inspectors noted the Council's work on equality, diversity and issues

affected by 'Black Lives Matter'. They also noted some of the Council's challenges which were outlined in the previous inspection around timeliness of assessment and rates of child protection enquiries. Gary Jones commented that this was a key issue of importance for the Council and they are working to continue to drive improvements in these areas.

Gary Jones informed the Committee that Officers present during the annual engagement meeting spoke about some of the benefits of online meetings. It enabled closer working relationships between schools and social workers; good attendance at meetings and it allowed safeguarding partnership arrangements to continue throughout the Covid-19 lockdown period.

The Officer reported that in March 2020 Ofsted suspended routine inspections due to Covid-19. Instead they agreed to carry out focussed visits, without making a graded judgement, to review how Children Services are responding to children and families. The Officer drew the Committee's attention to page 27 of the agenda which summarised the areas Ofsted inspectors will evaluate during the focussed visits. After the inspection, the findings will be set out in a letter with any errors identified and the letter will outline the most needed areas for improvements.

Carolyn Fair reminded the Committee that there were significant concerns surrounding the Council's Mosaic system and funding was agreed so the system can be improved. There have been some changes made to the system already and the improvements are already being experienced by the team. She explained the upgrade to the system is projected to be in place by October next year.

Carolyn Fair stated that staff are working incredibly hard in unusual circumstances. She explained that senior officers are working with staff to help them recognise the progress that has been made and they are provided with a high level of wellbeing support.

Resolved that: the Committee noted the contents of the report.

12. Report on the Education of Looked After Children

Bridie McDonagh reported that there were no summer exams due to Covid-19 and therefore there were no assessment outcomes for key stages 1 and 2. She explained that the outcomes are currently being assessed and it will be provided by the schools at the end of the term once the pupils have settled in and started the catch up programmes.

The Officer reported that the 14 students who started Year 7 have settled in and were very excited about high school. She pointed to page 65 of the agenda which included some comments from students.

The Officer explained that although there were no exams for pupils in Year 11, there were Centre Assessed Grades based on teachers' views of the level and

quality of the students' work up to March 2020. She commented that the caveat with these grades is that it is based on a small sample size and there is a big gap between Looked After Children and their peers.

The Officer reported that the results were slightly better than predicted in the March 2020 report. The results were higher than last year's cohort as 31% and 24% achieved grades 4 and above in English Maths respectively. The performance in English and Maths of the 23 students who were entered for GCSEs the performance was an improvement from last year's cohort. Some students followed Foundation/Basic Skills Study Programmes.

The Officer reported that there were 12 students who did not gain any accreditation. Of these 12 students, 3 have only recently taken up residence in the UK and they have been enrolled in ESOL courses. There were also 6 young people with profound special educational needs who made progress educationally but they were not yet working at a level to achieve accredited qualifications.

The Officer reported on the Destination Data of pupils in the Post-16 cohort, which is not included in the report. 85% of young people who have completed Year 11 were still engaged in education and 1 student is in a training programme. There were only 2 pupils not in education in this group. She stated that she will provide more detail on Year 12 and 13 pupils at the next meeting.

The Officer explained that over the summer term the Virtual School continued with online PEP meetings. Many students carried on with tuition even though there were no exams. Harrow School continued to provide tuition to some Year 11s through the summer term and summer holidays. Prior to Covid-19, Harrow School tutored pupils face to face but due to the current situation the tutoring sessions were delivered online. Teachers from Harrow School targeted tuition for 15 students in Year 9 and 10.

The Officer reported on the Post-16 group's results. 14 students will start University and 43 students are at university in total which is 16% of the care leaver group. She explained that 16% is slightly lower than the previous academic year as there were a higher number of graduates. Young people achieved excellent pass rates ranging from 1st Class honours (3 students) 2:1 Degrees (8 students) and 2:2 Degrees (2 students). A further 2 will graduate in the Autumn term and another third-year student is due to graduate in Summer 2021. The Officer directed the Committee to pages 68 – 69 and Appendix 4 which detailed the University the young people attended and the subjects they studied.

The Officer informed the Committee that there were no Education Awards this year. They had asked the young people if they wanted a virtual event or if they wanted an event in small groups but the young people had declined these alternatives. The graduates expressed interest in attending the Education Awards next academic year, post-Covid-19. All the graduates were sent cards, vouchers and personal letters from Judith Finlay, Executive Director, Children, Adults and

Public Health. Bridie McDonagh also sent letters to students for their progress and achievement in BTEC and A-Levels. Cards, vouchers, and letters were also sent to 60 children ranging from Early Years to Year 6 pupils for their enthusiasm for pursuing education through lockdown.

The Officer shared the attendance figures for September 2020 which are not included in the report. There was a 93% attendance rate which is an improvement from the last academic year (92.4%). The unauthorised absence and authorised absence was lower than last year.

In response to questions by the Committee:

- Bridie McDonagh responded that all they received 859 computers from the government which have all been distributed to looked after children, children with child protection plans, children in need and care leavers. She reported that 149 computers for disadvantaged Year 10s were distributed directly to schools. All looked after children who required a laptop have received one through the PPG initiative. She mentioned that there is another initiative where schools can directly apply for laptop funding which can cover situations when laptops are required by children that are new into care or on the cusp of care. Schools can also apply for laptop funding for children who are required to self-isolate if they do not have one at home.
- Bridie McDonagh stated that she has not received any reports of children being sent home to self-isolate but she will look into this matter.
- Judith Finlay stated that although London will be entering a higher lockdown tier on 16 October 2020, schools will remain open. There are currently 91% pupils in attendance. There are 17,000 pupils out of over 50,000 who are self-isolating for 2 weeks which will have a short-term effect on education and the Council is working with schools to put in place remote working opportunities. She reported that 87% of students with social workers are attending school.

Resolved that: the Committee noted the contents of the report.

13. Adopt London West Annual Report 2019.20 and update on Regional Adoption Agency (RAA)

Debbie Gabriel, Head of Service, Adopt London West (ALW) provided an update on the first annual report for Adopt London West which went live on 1 October 2019. The purpose of the report was to give an update on the activities that have taken place over this period. She also made the Committee aware that it is the middle of National Adoption Week.

The Officer reported that in the first year of operation, ALW had approved 22 adoptive households. There was representation from the BAME and LGBTQ community in the 22 approved households. There was also a positive balance of couples and single persons. Some of the households have been matched with

children. The other households are in the process of being linked or are in the process of family finding for children.

The Officer reported that 5 children in this borough have been placed for adoption, 4 adoption orders have already been granted and they are working towards placing more children in the next few weeks.

The Officer reported that the government provided funding to support the first National Adoption campaign which will run from 16th September until 8 December 2020. She stated that there is a lot of media coverage, including social media coverage of the campaign and programmes and publications to promote the campaign. Despite extensive work that has been carried out for many years, certain communities have the misconception that they would not be considered suitable to adopt. The main aim of the campaign was to dispel myths around adoption and send the message that people from various communities can be suitable adopters.

The Officer reported that there is also a more focussed campaign in London and Birmingham, managed by Homes for Good, to recruit more adopters from the BAME community. To support this, each of the Adopt London partners are running a weekly 'meet the adopter' events and information evenings which run on a monthly basis. Homes for Good are working with faith leaders across different communities to help community members understand that they are not necessarily precluded from adopting. Homes for Good also assists Adopt London partners learn how to support and welcome enquiries from diverse communities.

The Officer stated that the Adopt London Partnership provided an opportunity to improve and standardise practise across London and nationally. It allows commissioning opportunities and the ability to pool resources to efficiently invest in initiatives that can lead to positive effects across London. For example, the Adopt London Partnership used the additional funding from government to come up with innovative services to support families across London during the Covid-19 pandemic. They will be evaluating the outcomes from those services offered during Covid-19 to influence the Department of Education in terms of future spending on the Adoption Support Fund.

In response to questions by the Committee, Debbie Gabriel responded:

- It is a complex picture to explain the reason behind fewer BAME families adopting. She added that some families feel they are not suitable adopters for various reasons. The national campaign and the more targeted campaign managed by Homes for Good aims to dispel misconceptions around adoption to encourage more diverse families to adopt.
- They have made cash payments to families so that they can change their accommodation to make it more suitable for adoption. For example, payments have been made to divide a bedroom into two rooms. She added that they previously had a requirement for all adopters to have a spare room. However, they now more realistic and look at families' accommodations on a case by case basis and enquire about their future plans for moving.

Debbie Gabriel informed the Committee that they have released a video of the Adopt London Choir on: <https://adoptlondon.org.uk/news/adopt-london-choir-support/>

Resolved that: the Committee noted the contents of the reported and wished ALW a happy first anniversary.

14. Social Services Complaints Report on Looked After Children (April to June 2020)

Judith Finlay reported that there were 7 informal complaints from April to June 2020. None of the 7 complaints were been upheld; 4 were partially upheld and 3 were not upheld. She commented that too many were related to housing matters which they will address going forward. She stated there were no stage 2 or 3 complaints.

Resolved that: the Committee noted the contents of the report.

15. Management Information Summary – Children Looked After

Carolyn Fair highlighted the quarter 1 performance data in her report. There were 318 looked after children in Ealing at the end of quarter 1, down from 352 at the same time in 2019. In June 2020, 35 of the 318 looked after children were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), down from 53 in June 2019. There were 207 children on a Child Protection Plan at the end of the first quarter.

The Officer reported that the timeliness of the children and family assessments is continually improving, with 70.2% assessments completed on time between April 2020 to June 2020 and the team is currently at 73%.

The Officer reported that the stability of children's placements remain very strong with only 1.2% of the total number of looked after children having 3 or more placement moves at the end of quarter 1.

The Officer reported that 70% of 17-18 year old care leavers were in employment, education or training (EET) and 69% of 19-21 year old care leavers were in EET at the end of the first quarter.

Resolved that: the Committee noted the contents of the report.

16. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next hearing is on 10 December 2020.

This meeting ended at 19:20 hours.

