



NOTICE OF MEETING

Scrutiny Review - Corporate Parenting

MONDAY 13TH DECEMBER, 2010 at 18:00 HRS – CIVIC CENTRE, HIGH ROAD, WOOD GREEN, LONDON N22 8LE

MEMBERS: Councillors Alexander, Ejiofor (Chair), Gibson and Solomon

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Ms. Y. Denny (church representative) and Ms. M. Jemide, Ms. S. Marsh and Ms. S. Young (parent governor representatives)

AGENDA

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**
2. **URGENT BUSINESS**
3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

A member with a personal interest in a matter who attends a meeting of the authority at which the matter is considered must disclose to that meeting the existence and nature of that interest at the commencement of that consideration, or when the interest becomes apparent.

A member with a personal interest in a matter also has a prejudicial interest in that matter if the interest is one which a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the member's judgment of the public interest **and** if this interest affects their financial position or the financial position of a person or body as described in paragraph 8 of the Code of Conduct **and/or** if it relates to the determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to them or any person or body described in paragraph 8 of the Code of Conduct.

4. **MINUTES (PAGES 1 - 8)**

To approve the minutes of the meetings of 5 October and 8 November 2010 (attached).

5. CORPORATE PARENTING

To receive evidence from a range of services on how well supported looked after children are in finding employment, training opportunities and housing.

6. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

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03 December 2010

**MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW - CORPORATE PARENTING
TUESDAY, 5 OCTOBER 2010**

Councillors: Alexander, Ejiofor (Chair), Gibson and Solomon

Co-opted Members: Ms. Y. Denny (church representative) and Ms. S. Marsh (parent governor)

LC6. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

LC7. URGENT BUSINESS

None.

LC8. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

LC9. MINUTES

The Panel noted that some young people had been approached regarding their participation in the review with a view to two of them being co-opted onto the Panel. Whilst they were keen to meet and feed in their views, they were not in a position to commit to regularly attend meeting of the Panel. The young people in question were part of a group of care leavers who met on a monthly basis. Their next meeting was in two weeks time.

There were a number of ways in which the Panel could meet with relevant children and young people in order to obtain their views. There was the Children in Care Council, which would shortly be having its inaugural meeting. In addition, there was the Leaving Care Forum and the Study Club. It was agreed that dates of forthcoming meeting would be circulated to Members of the Panel so arrangements to visit appropriate forums could be made.

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of 14 September 2010 be approved.

LC10. CORPORATE PARENTING - EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

The Panel commented that targets for the education attainment of children in care appeared to be relatively unambitious. It was noted that the targets were nationally set as part of the local set of performance indicators and the Council was therefore unable to set higher ones.

Attracta Craig, the Haringey Virtual School Head, welcomed this view by the Panel. Her service had high expectations for young people and had submitted higher targets but these had been turned down. They believed that young people could perform well. Good grades at GCSE were very important and helped to keep young people out of the NEETs (not in education, employment and training) category. The ages between 16 and 19 could prove challenging if young people had not secured 5 passes at A – C. One of the reasons why young people might not do well was because of the

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frequent changes in their domestic arrangements and there was a close correlation between results and disruption.

69% of care leavers were in employment and training, although this did not necessarily mean that they would go on to do well. A lot was now being done to address the educational performance of LAC and this focussed on the whole period of their education, up to 19 years of age. One of the reasons why the virtual school was set up was to enable an overview to be taken. The service had not previously realised just how important the years between 16 and 19 were. The Panel were of the view that it would be useful for the service to consider what success might look like for each child.

It was noted that moving children during the year of their GCSEs could be particularly detrimental and was avoided wherever possible. Consideration was being given to what could be done to support 'A' level performance. There was currently a mismatch between birth dates relating to placements and the dates for 'A' Level exams which could lead to difficulties. Whilst care ended at 18, exams took place the following June for most young people.

The educational performance of Haringey's LAC was a success story. Performance compared very well with that achieved nationally and in other London boroughs. However, although the borough was doing very well, the aspiration was to do even better. This would allow young people to be more successful and independent and to close the gap with other children. Interventions that had taken place had proven to be effective.

The Panel complimented the service on the excellent results that had been achieved. It was noted that the number of LAC in Haringey was double that of some other boroughs.

A number of tools were used to monitor progress. Data was used and the progress of children was tracked. It could nevertheless be challenging. 40% of LAC had been the subject of fixed term exclusion in the last academic year and schools could find them hard to handle. However, there had only been 1 permanent exclusion. There had been a training programme for designated teachers. Haringey had had a virtual head teacher for some time and had brought this in prior to it being made compulsory for local authorities. Of particular note was the partnership with Tottenham Hotspur who were involved in providing a range of opportunities and events for LAC, including work experience.

The service had been short listed for four Children and Young People Now awards. This included one for corporate parenting for the work to develop a book club. This involved working with the Library Service and the Big Green bookshop to deliver books to children's homes. They had been nominated for the Learning Award for their Study Club. This had existed since 2005 and involved young people between key stages 2 and 4 meeting every week with staff from the Tuition Service. There had also been a nomination for Third Sector Engagement for their South Africa project. This had entailed children and young people who were considered at risk from going into residential care getting the chance to go to South Africa. In addition, BBC's Newsround were using the borough as an example of how children in care could do well academically.

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All LAC were offered after school tuition. There was a drive to encourage more of them to take up the offer. In 2009, although 66 offers were made, only 29 were accepted. The amount of tuition was fixed at 10 hours. 152 young people were based within the borough whilst 192 were outside.

The Council was accountable for how well LAC performed academically. All local authorities now had virtual schools. In addition, there were also designated teachers and school governors for LAC. The Virtual Head worked with the Council's Admissions Service to ensure that all LAC were placed appropriately.

In terms of the GCSE performance for 2010, 31% of LAC got 5 passes between A and C. This comprised of 19 young people. Only 2 of these had been predicted to gain such passes two years ago at KS3. When interventions were made, learning could be accelerated. The interventions were often a range of simple and small things like getting to know the young people, showing an interest and having high expectations.

They were not always successful though. Things could happen to the young people which inhibited their performance. For some young people, getting 1 A-G pass might be a significant achievement. It was important that the achievements of all young people children was celebrated. The service worked closely with headteachers and school governing bodies to ensure that they fulfilled their statutory responsibilities.

The Chair of the Panel commented that he was not aware of the issue of designated school governors for LAC being discussed during his time on a school governing body and requested confirmation that all schools had these.

The Panel also requested information on the following:

- Reg. 33 visits to residential homes
- Feedback obtained from foster carers

The Panel thanked Ms Craig and Ms Haith for their contribution.

**Cllr Joseph Ejiofor
Chair**

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**MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW - CORPORATE PARENTING
MONDAY, 8 NOVEMBER 2010**

Councillors Alexander, Ejiofor (Chair), Gibson and Solomon
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Co-opted members: Ms Y. Denny (Church representative) and Ms. S. Young (Parent governor)

LC11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

LC12. URGENT BUSINESS

None.

LC13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

LC14. MINUTES

AGREED:

That consideration of the minutes of the meeting of 5 October be deferred until the next meeting.

LC15. CORPORATE PARENTING

The Panel received evidence from a number of foster carers and staff.

It was noted that prospective foster carers could have the perception that private agencies paid better than the local authority. However, although private agencies charged more, they also took a percentage of the amount. When carers spoke to the local authority, they realised that there was no financial benefit to working for an agency. In the past, only private agencies had offered out-of-hours support but the local authority now also provided this.

It was considered that education was the biggest challenge that faced children in care. The children that performed better were generally those that had received tutoring at home. This had provided a real benefit for children. The need for tutoring was established by the social worker – some children got it whilst others did not.

A constant social worker could also make a significant difference. Turnover of social workers seemed to go through phases. Sometimes there was stability and sometimes there were a lot of changes and/or gaps. In some cases, the young person did not know the social worker had changed. In such cases, contact had to be with the team manager and responses to enquires could take time.

It was noted that all foster carers also had a social worker and they could be used in circumstances where the young person could not contact their own social worker. However, it was felt that it was important that the young person was able to speak to

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their own social worker and they could become frustrated if this was not possible. If social workers were very good, they could be given additional work and this could lead to them having case loads that were too heavy. In addition, the transition to leaving care did not always work well.

It was felt that support groups for foster carers funded by the Council and run through Haringey Foster Carers Association worked very well. They were well run and beneficial for carers. The Chair of the Foster Carers Association had played been a very important part in this.

It was thought that young people could benefit from life skills training as such basic skills could not be taken for granted.

It was noted that a lot of care was taken in ensuring that placements were appropriate. The majority of carers were now black and there was now more of a problem with placing white children. There was a particular need for more foster carers from Eastern Europe. It was important to place children where they would feel most comfortable. Carers could play a role in encouraging children to develop an awareness of their own culture and background.

It could be difficult for social workers to engage with young people on certain issues such as sexual health if they were of a different gender and it would therefore be better if they could be matched according to this. However, there was a shortage of male social workers.

Young people could visit their foster carer after they had left care. They saw foster carers as their parents and had a different relationship with them to the one they had with their social worker. The young people saw themselves as part of the family. Social workers were not always accessible and were subject to change.

It could be difficult for young people who went out of London for their higher education as there might not be anywhere for them to go during vacations.

It was considered that there was a need for support to address challenging behaviour by young people as it was important that they understood boundaries. Working to impose discipline on them would be better than constantly moving them. It was noted that emotional support was available. The Tavistock Centre provided this but it was not always wanted by children or carers. The service did not wish to have to move children in such circumstances but had to if carers were unable to cope. Challenging behaviour was sometimes due to the experience of trauma.

It was felt that support services could respond more quickly. This was particularly true of the Tavistock and audiology. The Tavistock was not always suitable for children. Many went once and did not go back. Although some children needed counselling, others would be more suited to mentoring. Both the Tavistock and CAMHS had long waiting lists. There was little support that was available below this level.

It was felt that support for foster carers had improved in recent years. In particular, there was more consistency in the supervising of social workers. A continuing concern was the time that it took to deal with allegations against carers and the poor communication that often accompanied suspensions of them. However, it was noted that if an allegation was made, the service had an obligation to investigate it.

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It was felt that young people could be better prepared for leaving care by a period of semi independent care. Processes were not always explained as well as they could be. Young people did not always know all their entitlements. It was noted that young people who returned to the home of foster carers needed to be CRB checked if there were new foster children. There could sometimes be problems with envy where there were new children in the home.

Carers helped young people to prepare for leaving care. They were given £52 to live on and, to assist with this, they were taught budgeting skills. However, young people could sometimes not be prepared for the range of costs associated with independence, such as heating and lighting. The accommodation that they were offered was not always of a particularly high standard. The teaching of skills to prepare young people for independence was included in the care plan.

There had been long waits in the past to hear the results of applications to foster and it had sometimes been quicker to use agencies. This had improved and there was now a welcome programme for new cares which included an invitation to the support group.

It was suggested that all children in care could given a trust fund that the Council controlled and that they received at the age of 18. The allowance given to carers currently included an element for saving for young people but not all carers were good at using this effectively. A trust fund could replace this. The longer that children were in care, the more money that they would get. It could also be extended to those cared for by agency carers. It was noted that the Council had looked at this option previously but it had proven to be difficult to set up.

The recruitment process was felt to be onerous. However, it was acknowledged that guidance had to be followed and the process could be intrusive. Haringey had high standards and it was inevitable that there would be drop out during the recruitment process.

The Panel thanked foster carers and staff for their kind assistance.

Clr Joseph Ejiofor

Chair

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