



Haringey Council

Agenda item:

[No.]

**Children and Young People's Consultative Committee
On 06 July 2010**

Report Title: Children in Care Stocktake June 12th 2010

Forward Plan reference number (if applicable): n/a

Report of: **The Director of The Children and Young People's Service**

Wards(s) affected: **All**

Report for: **Information**

1. Purpose (That is, the decision required)

1.1. To inform members of the Committee about the event, information gathered and planned response to this.

2. Introduction by Cabinet Member (if necessary)

2.1 n/a

3. Recommendations

3.1 Members of the CYPCC are asked to note the contents of the report

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4. Director of Finance Comments

4.1 The financial implications of these activities are monitored as part of the council's monthly budget management process. Given current pressures

across all Council budgets, the support costs especially to the Children in Care council are under review. If they cannot be protected, support will come from core service areas.

5. Head of Legal Services Comments

6. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

7. Financial Implications

7.1 See comments above

8. Legal Implications

There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

9. Equalities Implications

9.1 As we progress this work, there are a number of key groups we need to ensure have their voices heard – they include those who are disabled; those who are placed out of borough and those whose first language is not English.

10. Background

10.1 This event was set up in response to a request from the Corporate Parenting Committee that Haringey ensure that the views of young people in care were taken. The intention was to run a local version of the National Stocktake for Children in Care organised in 2009 by the then Secretary of State. Questions for consideration were therefore adapted from those used in the National Stocktake. The purpose was to use the information gathered from this to inform future planning for Children in Care and related services. Whilst there are regular opportunities for those young people of 16plus to meet with senior managers, including the Director of CYPS, the younger children have no such avenue. We also need to establish a Children in Care Council in Haringey and this event was viewed as a precursor to work on this project. A Children in Care Council comprises of a representative group of young people in care who will put across views on key issues for children in care, to both the CYPS and to elected members.

10.2 The Tottenham Hotspur Foundation, who undertake a range of partnership work with Haringey's children in care, particularly in relation to education, kindly offered to host the stocktake for us. They also provided staff members to assist in planning and running the day. The young people attending were invited to attend within age groups; 7-12 and 12-18. Invites were sent to those young people who had been in care for at least 3 months. Given the fact that very young children could not be included and those newly entering care were also not invited the total invite list amounted to around 250 young people. The programme included a session to vote on all the topics using an electronic voting system, a time to relax and have some refreshments and then we concluded with a tour of the Tottenham stadium. For the older group we also had an impromptu discussion whilst they were eating their refreshments.

The Stocktake Event

10.3 On the day itself a total of **40 young people** attended the event, split across the two groups. Numbers on the voting system reflected slightly less children as just a few didn't feel sufficiently confident to fully take part. One young man actually sat out of the room for the voting but did come in and join in the refreshments and tour afterwards. The younger group included at least 2 five year olds as they had come along with older siblings. There were also a few young people there above the age of 12 because, again, they had come with siblings. In the older group we included a 19 year old care leaver who had come to help with the event. One overriding impression that all of us who worked at the event went away with was of how accommodating all the young people were with each other. Whilst each young person was focused on their own participation they also seemed very happy to make sure the views of all present were included. Older ones helped the younger children with the voting and when comments were made within the group everyone demonstrated respect for the different views expressed. The atmosphere was calm, accepting and inclusive. Jennifer James, Head of Service for Participation, took each group through the questions offering explanations where appropriate.

Outcome of the Voting Exercise:

The younger group; 5-15 years old

10.4 The majority (68%) responded that they were kept safe in care very well or well. The others stated just about OK. There were some negative (22%) very poor responses when children were asked about whether they enjoyed good activities and leisure time. Nearly 60% were positive in their responses but the large amount of inadequate experiences were

concerning. The response for education and help with this had 25% voting to say “very poorly”. Although this was the younger group 40% said that Haringey were poor or very poor in their help to young people in care to get good jobs in the future. They were divided on how often social workers should visit young people but the majority, 54.55% said monthly visits (as opposed to quarterly, or less) were their preferred option. (This is what they currently receive). Finally a significant proportion of those attending felt that their views would make not much or would make no difference to our planning for them.

The older group; 12-19 years old

10.5 In contrast to the younger group the majority of this group did not believe that Haringey were doing well at keeping young people safe. In fact 50% voted that this was very poor or poor. On the question regarding activities and leisure pursuits the score was also low, with 64% voting poor or very poor on this. When it came to assisting with educational and getting good jobs responses were low again in particular regarding jobs, with a 78% voting poor or very poor in this area. There was also little confidence in opinions of young people being listened too. On the issue of social worker visits scores were similar to those of the first group with once a month coming in at the highest percentage.

10.6 On the list of choices in the last two areas there was resounding support for not moving young people when they are aged 15 or 16, i.e. during their GCSE year. Even higher percentages were given when it came to better leisure activities, helping young people to stay with their foster carers and more money for young people in care who go onto higher education.

10.7 During the informal discussion over lunch there was some debate about how young people had felt discriminated against for being in care. Around one third of the group had experienced this either often or sometimes.

10.8 Another issue that came up in the discussion were their reviews. Young people wanted more of an opportunity to contribute to their reviews without feeling they might be offending their foster carer (and thereby causing problems for themselves). There was overwhelming support for reviews taking place in a more neutral venue than a foster carer’s home. A further point was made about lack of opportunity for young people to go away on activities with others of their age rather than as a family unit with carers. Possibly an adventure activity week or maybe a trip organised by a youth organisation. One young person stated that a chance to have some

space away for himself would have been much appreciated when he was in foster care.

10.9 Interesting points were made about the lack of balance between encouraging young people to be independent but not nurturing them enough. (Put in different words by the young people but this was the essence of what was said). One young woman commented that being in care was more than enough in terms of having to be independent. She said “more help from you (i.e. Haringey)” would be essential to make the experience of being in care more positive.

11. Summary and Conclusions

11.1 Prior to the event it had been totally accepted that urgent work is required to establish a Children in Care Council. We informed the young people who attended on the day that specific resources are now being set aside to make this possible. We explained that work towards this would be ongoing and we hoped to start the process of appointments to the Council during the autumn. There is clearly a pressing need to forge ahead with this as soon as possible.

11.2 We also need to run some focus groups to further explore points raised by the participants on June 12th. The young people were impressive in the way that they put across their views and it is vitally important to make sure that more such opinions are captured and acted upon. This will assist the Council and the Children in Care Service to better plan for the needs of those in our care. Some of those who gave their views were care leavers, or almost leaving care, and they could be very helpful in engaging younger children in care.

11.3 The service will construct a response to all the points raised on the day and ensure they are fed back to those who attended – it will be important that they know their views have been heard and acted upon.

11.4 All who attended the event are being contacted by the Barnardos Children’s Rights Service (with whom we have a temporary contract at the moment) to receive feedback in a user friendly format. This will also be conveyed to all our young people in care. We also wish to inform all children in care of the next steps regarding focus groups and ongoing communication with them (possibly through newsletters and web information plus other events that can help them to keep in touch with each other and the planning for all children in care). We have a clear responsibility to ensure that all views are listened to and valued.

12. Consultation

Jennifer James, Head of Service Children's Networks North and Lead for Participation and Chris Chalmers, Head of Service Children in Care.

Approximately 10% of young people in care who are old enough to share their views.