

MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW - CORPORATE PARENTING TUESDAY, 14 SEPTEMBER 2010

Councillors: Ejiofor and Solomon

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

Apologies: Councillor Alexander

LC1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Received from Councillor Alexander.

LC2. URGENT BUSINESS

None.

LC3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

LC4. DRAFT SCOPE/ TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Panel considered the scope and terms of reference for the review in detail. In reference to outcomes, they were of the view that stability was of particular importance. They felt that the review would look at what particular outcomes might be the most appropriate ones for Haringey.

It was felt that it would be useful to consider the cost per child of looked after children and for the Panel to receive appropriate financial data including benchmarking information. In the light of the current financial pressures, it was important to consider if it was possible to moderate costs whilst not adversely affecting outcomes.

In addition, the Panel requested the following information as part of the review:

- Details of how foster parents are recruited and checked;
- Education statistics, including comparative data;
- How the Council monitored long term outcomes;
- Statistics on the number of missing children;
- Work undertaken to address teenage conception and how parenting values were promoted.

It was agreed that a specific meeting would be arranged to focus on education. It was also agreed that the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People would be invited to attend one of the meetings to give her views and that the perspective of a range of Councillors on their corporate parenting role would be sought.

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The Panel were of the view that the review would benefit from the co-option of two young people who had recent experience of being in care and agreed that these be sought from the C&YPS's Leaving Care Review Panel.

AGREED:

1. That, subject to the above mentioned comments and amendments, the draft scope and terms of reference be approved.
2. That further meetings of the Panel be arranged for 5 October and 8 November.

LC5. CORPORATE PARENTING - PRESENTATION

The Panel received a presentation (attached) from Debbie Haith, the Deputy Director for Children and Families from the Childrens and Young People's Service.

The Panel noted that children and young people did not like the term "looked after children". However, it was a term that was generally understood by people. Looked after children were children in the care of the Council through a care order made by a court or voluntary agreement with their parent(s). They could be looked after in a children's home or by foster carers or by other family members. Care leavers were children who had been looked after by the Council and were still provided with assistance, advice and guidance. It could be difficult to keep track of them after the age of 21 as this could only be done with their agreement.

The Council as a whole was the corporate parent and Councillors had a key role within this. In order for vulnerable children to thrive, the entire Council had to play its part. Being a good corporate parent meant that the Council should:

- Accept responsibility for children in it's care and make their needs a priority
- Seek for them the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own children

The Council was currently responsible for 601 looked after children and 462 care leavers. The largest age group was children between the ages of 10 and 15. The numbers had gone up significantly in recent years. The numbers in Haringey were well above the national average and tracked those of statistical neighbours. Encouragement and support was given to families to provide care where possible. Children cared for by such "kinship" arrangements were not categorised as looked after.

In terms of education and training, children in Haringey performed significantly better than those in statistical neighbours. Provisional GCSE results were as follows:

- 17% 5A* - C including Maths and English
- 31% A5* - C
- 71% 1A – G

65% of care leavers were in employment, education and training (EET) and 94% were in appropriate accommodation.

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Care Matters had required the Council to create an environment for care which was safe and which aimed high for children and young people. Stability was an important factor and social workers played a key role within this. Specific work was also undertaken in preventing young people from coming into care. In terms of education, there was now a “virtual head teacher” for all looked after children.

There was an expectation arising from Care Matters that each local area would develop a pledge for looked after children based on its corporate responsibilities. London Councils agreed on a London wide pledge, which Haringey had signed up to. In terms of participation, there was also a requirement to set up a Children in Care Council.

Specific measures were taken to help ensure that looked after children had access to a good education. All care plans for children under five described arrangements for the child to access high quality early years education. Measures were also taken to ensure that children were not moved during years 10 and 11, except in exceptional circumstances and that those placed out of borough has the same access to education as those in borough. There was provision of £500 a year for looked after children who were at risk of not achieving expected standards.

It was noted that the Council tried to ensure that children in its care went to the best schools available. This could include making school admission appeals if applications for preferred options were unsuccessful. Efforts were made to put gifted children in schools that would enable them to realise their full potential.

There was a requirement for all looked after children to be allocated a designated teacher to promote their educational achievement and this role was being strengthened. There was now also guidance for local authorities on how to support carers in the SEN process. Additional funding was now provided for looked after children to have the opportunity for 2 hours free extended activities per week. Home school agreements were being reviewed in order to ensure that full consideration was given to foster carers and residential staff. Training for foster parents now addressed educational achievement and how to support children’s literacy. School governors also had a role and specific training was now being provided.

All looked after children were required to have a named Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). This person played a very important role as a mentor for the young person. Such individuals were not connected with the decision making process. Assistance could be provided for young people until the age of 25 if they asked for assistance with further education and this could be included in their pathway plan.

The Council’s Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee undertook a monitoring, challenge and scrutiny in respect of looked after children. In particular, it received a considerable amount of statistical information. In addition, the Council also undertook its corporate parent role through the following:

- Total Respect training for professionals on how to communicate effectively with children and young people;
- Regulation 33 visits to children’s homes
- Fostering and Adoption Panels
- Fora for consultation and participation

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- The roles and responsibilities of the Leader, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and the Children and Young People's Service
- The Children's Trust arrangements and the HSP Board
- The local Safeguarding Children's Board

The Panel noted that agency foster parents should be subject to the same standards as Haringey ones. They all had to be registered and specific assessments were also undertaken on their families.

The Panel thanked Ms Haith for her presentation.

Cllr Joseph Ejiofor
Chair