

**MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW - CORPORATE PARENTING
MONDAY, 13 DECEMBER 2010**

Councillors Ejiofor (Chair), Gibson and Solomon
:
Co-opted Ms Y Denny (church representative)
Member:

LC1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Alexander.

LC2. URGENT BUSINESS

None.

LC3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

LC4. MINUTES

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meetings of 5 October and 8 November 2010 be approved.

LC5. CORPORATE PARENTING

The Panel received evidence from:

- Chris Chalmers and Emma Cumbergen from the Leaving Care and Asylum Service;
- Louise Jones, the Head of Integrated Youth Support;
- Paul Clarke, from the Council's Regeneration Service;
- Denise Gandy, the Head of Housing Support and Options; and
- Helen Smith from Job Centre Plus.

Emma Cumbergen reported that she currently worked with young people between 16 and 21. However, this was going to change from April, when young people up to 25 would also be included. She managed personal advisers and the after care service. Their work included preparing pathway plans for care leavers, which help to prepare young people for the transition to adulthood. They were holistic plans and included reference to their families as well as education and employment and housing issues. They also dealt with both practical and emotional issues.

Work was undertaken with particularly challenged young people. Whilst some young people coped very well with the transition, others struggled. In particular, some had mental health issues and, in such circumstances, links needed to be developed with Adult social care services. The service worked with the Tavistock Clinic to address mental health issues.

Care leavers could have problems with relationships and struggle to make friends. The service could support young people who wished to make contact with their natural

MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW - CORPORATE PARENTING MONDAY, 13 DECEMBER 2010

families. This could be a positive experience but could also be a great challenge. Some young people were able to keep a good relationship with their foster carers.

Ms Chalmers commented that some young people could manage foster placements only until about 14, when these began to break down. They could find making an attachment to a foster carer to be very difficult. However, difficulties could also be experienced if they got in touch with their natural parents. This had to be dealt with very carefully.

Ms Cummergen reported that residential social workers could assist young people in their care with life skills. There was a range of accommodation options for those young people who left residential care at 16. If they were felt to be in substantial need, foster care was found. However, some young people were in residential care as they could not cope with foster care. Each young person had a key worker who would produce a LAC (looked after child) review. Care was reviewed continuously. Permanent accommodation was normally found when the young person was 18, although exceptions could be made if further support was needed. Accommodation was normally social housing.

The new guidance which would come into force in 2011 and extended support until the age of 25 would add an additional 10% onto current caseloads. The transition of support from C&YPS to Adults tended to be smoother if the referral took place before the age of 18. The lack of a diagnosis could be a stumbling block. However, they did not wish to unnecessarily stigmatise young people. Efforts were currently being made to improve the transition process by improving links with Adults. Once young people were known to Adults, it could be difficult for them to engage as there was a tendency for them to not turn up for appointments. C&YPS staff had to persuade them to attend in such circumstances. Young people needed independence and many care leavers had the necessary skills for this.

Ms Jones reported that she managed both Connexions and the Youth Service. Many care leavers attended their projects. The service had access to a young persons counselling service and could make referrals for mental health issues, substance abuse, trauma etc. Targeted support was available for young people at risk of offending.

The main purpose of Connexions was to help young people into employment and training. Although it was a universal service, much of its work was targeted. The service also received referrals. The support that could be provided was generally of a light touch but more intensive assistance could be provided if need be. Individuals could be passed onto specialist advisers or referred to other services if necessary. The service was proactive in making contact with young people before the age of 16 and had good sources of information. All young people were tracked until the age of 19. The relationship with young people was nevertheless purely voluntary. Particular attention was given to young people not in education or employment (NEETs). The service worked intensely with them and helped with things like the preparation of CVs. They liaised closely with Job Centre plus and Housing.

Connexions was funded by the Department of Education through Area Based Grant. However, this was to end in March. The Youth Service received core funding but Connexions would have to revert back to being the Careers Service. Funding for the additional services that had been provided had been moved back to schools. Funding

MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW - CORPORATE PARENTING MONDAY, 13 DECEMBER 2010

for career guidance for young people in care was to be given to schools but they could pass it back to Connexions if they wished. Careers education could be undertaken as part of the school curriculum.

The Panel noted that the Connexions worker in the Leaving Care team was to be lost and there was concern about the implications of this as it would make such assistance less accessible for care leavers.

Ms Jones stated that Connexions had a database of apprenticeships. It was noted that all companies that were working on Decent Homes schemes were obliged to take on apprentices. Specific support was available for NEETs. Apprenticeships did not always lead to permanent jobs. However, providers were vetted to ensure that placements met an acceptable standard. All care leavers had a personal adviser that worked with them. All young people were tracked and statistics on NEETs were kept. It noted that the Leaving Care team kept their own statistics.

Paul Clarke from Economic Regeneration reported on the Haringey Guarantee scheme. It was aimed at people above the age of 16 to help them get into sustained employment. The aim was to remove any barriers to finding work. An action plan was developed that aimed to not only get people into work but enable them to stay in work. The scheme provided employment advisers and wrap around services. Training opportunities could be provided in a wide range of areas such as social work, security, construction and fashion. Support was also given to people who wanted to establish their own businesses. Assistance could also be given on a wide range of issues such as drugs and alcohol problems and childcare. There were very good relations with Tottenham and Wood Green Job Centre plus. There were also good links with Connexions, who could refer to the scheme.

Nobody was ever written off. They helped people to develop specific job goals by constructing reverse career paths. Specific help could be given to young people with children. It was noted that Connexions had a special adviser that worked with teenage parents. The scheme was proactive in its approach and undertook outreach in the community. The future of the scheme in its current form was uncertain. However, it was likely that the opportunities that it provided would still be available in some form.

It was noted that all lone parents receiving benefit would be in regular contact with Job Centre plus. Ms Smith reported that different processes were in place according to the age of the individual. All young people under the age of 18 were required to be in contact with Connexions, with whom they worked closely. They had been able to provide access to apprenticeships and worked with various training associates. However, current availability of opportunities was patchy and many programmes were coming to an end. Young people between the age of 18 and 24 were eligible for the New Deal programme which was aimed at providing access to longer term employment options.

Job Centre Plus dealt with young people that covered the full range of needs. It was a universal service and they would not normally be aware that someone was a care leaver. There were close links with both the Haringey Guarantee scheme and Connexions. Some care leavers could be particularly attracted to a career in the armed services as it could appear to be an extension of the care background.

MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW - CORPORATE PARENTING MONDAY, 13 DECEMBER 2010

It was noted that a lot of care leavers lacked self confidence and that Job Centre Plus could help to motivate them.

Denise Gandy reported that care leavers of above the age of 18 were considered for permanent housing when their placements ended. Care leavers were given 'reasonable preference' under the Council's allocations policy. Approximately 1,000 households were re-housed into social housing each year. This included roughly 200 one bedroom flats. There were currently around 20,000 on the Council's housing register. A new policy was shortly to be introduced which would see the end of the points system. It instead placed people into bands according to their level of need. A quota of care leavers (currently set at 50) would be placed in band A, which was the highest level of need. This normally meant that they were re-housed in a matter of weeks/months rather than a longer period. The quota of 50 lets for care leavers would be reviewed each year to ensure that it was consistent with actual demand. They retained Band A status for six months. After this time, it was reviewed and, if appropriate, extended. It was noted that the Leaving Care team advised young people on what was the best option for them.

In situations where young people were placed out of borough, the responsibility to re-house young people rested with the home borough. If they wished to re-locate to where they had been placed, they would need to approach the Council in that area for assistance and, if necessary, make a homeless application. Alternatively, help could be given to them in finding private rented accommodation in that area. It was possible for young people to defer their right to be re-housed until after university if that was agreed in advance between the Housing Service, Leaving Care and the young person.

A social housing map was available that showed the location of properties, the nature of the area and what was available. If particular issues had been identified with a property, a decision could be made not to offer it to a young person and to deal with it as a "sensitive let". The service had someone who could assist people in bidding for properties and was able to look out for suitable properties for them. Consideration could be given to providing a specific resource for care leavers.

It was noted that care leavers received after care support up to the age of 21. Contact took place at least every 3 months. Homes for Haringey visited all vulnerable tenants although it was not clear whether this included care leavers. It was also noted that a report was due to be considered by the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee on 24 January on social isolation and related issues.

Ms Chalmers reported that young people in care had access to the borough teenage pregnancy worker. A proportion of them had been subject to emotional distress and some had suffered sexual abuse. Some had little interest in protecting themselves and could see parenthood as an opportunity to have something of their own. Virtual babies could be used to give young people the opportunity of experiencing the reality of childcare. There was also a nurse who worked specifically with looked after children and could provide help and guidance. Whilst some care leavers lost their children to adoption, others were very good parents.

Ms Chalmers stated that Oldham had required every Council service to put something in their business plan that would assist care leavers. She also felt that Council staff could help by acting as mentors and assisting with things such as mock interviews. This could help them to develop aspirations and build better self belief. The Council

**MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW - CORPORATE PARENTING
MONDAY, 13 DECEMBER 2010**

was still a large organisation and should be able to provide such opportunities. Ms Gandy felt that support could be improved by starting to work with the young person at an earlier stage to increase the opportunity for planned moves and a smooth transition. A mentor who was able to follow the young person for a sustained period of time would also assist. In addition, it was felt that the responsibility for children and young people in care could be shared more evenly across the Council.

The Panel thanked all attendees for their kind assistance.

**Clr Joseph Ejiofor
Chair**