

**MINUTES OF THE JOINT MEETING OF CORPORATE PARENTING ADVISORY COMMITTEE & CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING POLICY AND PRACTICE COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, 17 MARCH 2011**

Councillors Allison, Amin, Engert, Hare, Peacock, Reith(Chair), Rice, Stennett and Watson

Apologies Councillor Davies, Alexander, and McNamara

Also Present: Councillor Solomon, Peter Lewis, Debbie Haith, Marion Wheeler, Sylvia Chew, Iain Lowe, Chris Chalmers, Attracta Craig,

MINUTE NO.	SUBJECT/DECISION	ACTON BY
JCCPSC 1	<p>APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR</p> <p>The Chair of Corporate Parenting Committee and Chair of the Children's Safeguarding Policy and Practice Committee had discussions, outside the meeting, regarding the appointment of the Chair for these Joint meetings and had agreed that they would alternate this responsibility. The Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee would begin this arrangement by chairing this first Joint meeting between these two Cabinet Advisory bodies.</p>	All to note
JCCPSC 2	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</p> <p>None were declared.</p>	
JCCPSC 3	<p>COURT AND LEGAL PROCESS</p> <p>A briefing was provided to the Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee and Children's Safeguarding Policy and Practice on how children's social care cases are managed through the family courts. The Joint Committee noted that there were: currently 600 looked after children, over 300 children subject to Child protection plans and also over 300 children that were the subject of 156 court proceedings. It was noted that, in the past 18 months, the number of proceedings had increased by over 17%. This had significant cost implications for the Council as the cost per set of proceedings was £4825. The circumstances and procedures for application to court for care and supervision orders were set out in the report. It was explained to the Joint Committee, that a care order would provide the Local Authority with parental responsibility for a child or young person, parents would not lose their parental responsibility and the emphasis was that the local authority would work in partnership with the parents. The thresholds for meeting a care order requirement, which the Local Authority must evidence, were outlined along with the main principles underlying court case management and the overriding objective in public law</p>	

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proceedings. There was also information on the duties which the courts and the Local Authority had in regard to the timetable for the Child. These guidelines were to ensure that there was due regard given to the significant steps in a child's life, these would include social, health and educational steps. There was also an update on the action being taken by the Local Authority to reduce the delays in the court care proceedings; this included having a dedicated team which had responsibility for children in care proceedings. There were currently proposals for external local performance improvement groups that would be multi agency and linked to local courts to provide a forum to deal with issues which arise locally such as delays in proceedings.

Members sought an understanding on the length of care proceedings, and whether these delays were being experienced solely by the Council. Members asked how the Local Authority could influence the court process to ensure that the children/young people, subject to the court care proceedings, faced as minimal amount of disruption and upheaval as possible. It was noted that the Director of Children and Young People's has been involved in discussions with the Greater London Family Panel (all judges and magistrates across London hearing care cases) and their chair (and Lead Judge for London) HHJ Altman. This has culminated in the Director being invited to join the London Family Justice Panel. This Panel, chaired by HHJ Altman, is the practice body for all London care courts where practice is monitored and new approaches developed to try and improve the work of the courts. The Panel meets quarterly and the Director will join the Panel for the first time in June 2011, though he is involved in work prior to those reviewing proposals by the Panel to the Family Justice Review being undertaken by the Government. The aim of this participation was to be in key position to communicate with principal legal counterparts the impact of delayed care proceedings and be in position to expedite them. There had already been preliminary discussions on reducing the number of court appearances. It was noted that some cases from Haringey would last over 60 weeks. The service was seeking to reduce this to at least 40 weeks. The Committee noted the causes of delays which were the number of independent expert witnesses statements being required and residential assessments. The high number of cases coupled with the delays to proceedings due to requests for extra information was also placing an increased pressure on support services for Children.

In terms of the Local Authority's role in the court process and the submission of evidence, it was noted that it could be more straightforward for the courts to consider evidence which showed physical neglect to a child with reports and photographic evidence, however it could be challenging to prove the detrimental impact of neglect on a child. Although photographic evidence of living conditions and additional reports provided by local authorities was considered, it was often the case that external expert evidence was also again requested. The Committee were assured that the Council's management of cases through the court process was seen to be paramount. The Joint Committee learned that court reports are seen by managers and

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	<p>Legal Services before submission. The care plan for the child in question would need to be signed off by the Head of Service. The Committee were reminded that the Children's service had been re-organised to enable the formation of a team dedicated to dealing with children's social care proceedings. This team work closely with legal and has a high level of expertise and skill in working with the Court process.</p> <p>The information provided was noted by the Committee.</p>	
<p>JCCPSP 4</p>	<p>SAFEGUARDING AND SUPPORT</p> <p>The independent member of the Children's Safeguarding Policy and Practice Committee provided the Committee with information on Section 47 of the Children's Act 1989 which set out the regulatory framework which Local authorities were obliged to follow for safeguarding children. There then followed a report on the Safeguarding and Support service which puts into practice these obligations. It was noted that the Safeguarding and Support team is separate to the First Response and Children in Care teams and delivers services to the most vulnerable in the borough. This service will be responsible for children that are subject to Child Protection Plans, Children in Need Plans and Supervision Orders. It was noted that there were 326 children and young people subject to Child Protection plans; this was an increase of 47% from two years ago. There were 141 children under 5 subject to CP Plans in the borough and this was an increase of 50% from Feb 2009. These increases were not dissimilar to those seen by other boroughs.</p> <p>The report set out the procedures and functions followed for Child Protection Conferences, and the Committee noted that according to London Safeguarding Procedures children and young people subject to these plans should be seen every 6 weeks. The Council were ensuring that children were seen every 4 weeks and looking to reduce this further to visits every two weeks. The report went onto explain the duties followed by Social Workers in Child Protection Plans and the additional role of the Safeguarding Panel. It was noted that there were 253 children and young people as at 28 February subject to child protection plans. Although there was no definitive time for a child or young person being subject to a child protection plan, key factors were the timing of services provided and the family's engagement with the process.</p> <p>The Committee were advised that there were 350 children/young people on Children in Need Plans. These children did not meet the criteria for a section 47 safeguarding investigation but would meet the criteria to receive a service from the Children's Social Care through Haringey's Consortium of Need and Intervention.</p> <p>Following the Baby Peter case, understanding was sought by the Joint Committee of the improvements in safeguarding in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Worker numbers and case loads 	

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- Supervision of Social Workers
- Sharing of Information among agencies
- Legal case work
- Auditing

The Joint Committee noted that there was a significant increase in the number of Social Workers and managers in the service with a majority of them Haringey employees which made a difference to the stability and efficiency of the service. The improvements in information sharing were easily apparent by the knowledge held by Social Workers of the contact points in service areas such as Adults and Housing.

A key issue, which was heavily emphasised by the service, was having a full knowledge of the visitors and residents to a child's home. The audits undertaken on child protection plans would also check the frequency of the visits made to a child's home. The Committee were advised that these audits were designed to identify any issues with working practices and gain an understanding of the themes emerging.

The supervision of Social Workers and practitioners and level of challenge to their work was felt to be correct. The quality working practices of the current Social Workers meant that they were more capable of dealing with challenging families. There had been training sessions around authoritative practices and ensuring that Social Workers were fully aware of the legal responsibilities around their roles. The relationship between Children's Services and Legal was reported to be very good with advice provided at the right time. There was also casework planning meetings between Children's services and Legal to challenge and scrutinise the process. There were good comments noted from new Social Workers on the manageable caseloads.

In regards to families understanding their role in the child protection plan and the expectations of them, Social Workers were trained to be clear in writing in the plan what changes in behaviour were needed from the family. In those cases, where there were issues of neglect, and the circumstances had not changed after a specified period, there would be a child protection conference to agree that care proceedings could be taken forward, this would be either through a legal order or by the family's consent.

Members asked about the proposal to having fortnightly visits to children on child protection plans and whether this would create additional work pressures for Social Workers in the service. In response it was felt, with the improvements made by the service, this would be achievable.

Members enquired about the process after a child/young person ceases to be the subject of a child protection plan and were advised that families are sign posted to universal services. It was noted that information on children and families, that have been subject to child protection plans and children in need plans, is required to be kept on record by the service for the positive reasons, that in the event the family require

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	<p>more support in the future, there is an understanding of their dynamics . This information may also be required in later years or be required by another borough if the family are moving and require support or signposting to relevant services. There would also be efforts made to obtain the family's views after the plan has ceased to counter against the feelings of stigma at having been the subject of a Child Protection Plan.</p> <p>In relation to Children in Need plans, more clarity was sought on the time period of the plans and the types of issues that would necessitate this plan as opposed to a Common assessment Framework (CAF). It was explained that some families will need a co-ordinated approach to accessing universal services as sign posting will not be sufficient. Therefore a Social worker will be assigned to co-ordinate this access for the family.</p> <p>The report and information received was noted by the committee</p>	
<p>JCCPSP 5</p>	<p>EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for consideration of the items below as they contain exempt information as defined in section 100a of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by section 12a of the Local Government Act 1985); paras 1&2; namely information relating to any individual, and information likely to reveal the identity of an individual.</p>	
<p>JCCPSP 6</p>	<p>ANALYSIS OF A SAMPLE OF CHILD PROTECTION CASES</p> <p>The independent member of the Safeguarding Policy and Practice Committee introduced the report which accompanied the previous report on the Safeguarding and Support services and specifically focused on Child Protection Plans, their challenges and issues. The independent member had examined a small sample of 15 cases starting with referrals and assessment undertaken in the first week of November, examining their case notes in February and looking at their outcomes in the first week of March.</p> <p>The Committee noted and discussed the findings of this qualitative research. It was noted that six of the 15 cases were closed or planned to be closed. Two of the children had a Child in Need plan, two children were in the care system. The remaining 5 children had good child protection plans in place. There was concern communicated about the timescales for holding Initial Child Protection Conferences which were required within 15 working days of strategy discussions and would have helped agencies come to a quicker conclusion on the child's needs. This was attributed to pressures on the conference timetable as the need for an ICPC can only be identified at the end of strategy discussions and therefore arrangements for the conference initiated after this time. It was also important to note, the timing of the audit, which was the lead up to</p>	

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	<p>the OFSTED inspection and also the seasonal time of year for staff leave. There had been previous independent audits commissioned by the Deputy Leader on adherence of the service to quality and timing of assessments which showed good practices in place. These key service area audits had also looked at the initial responses to a referral, strategy discussions and if the child had been seen alone. Because of the good improvement of the service, the audits were now concerned with examining practices in different parts of the services. The service itself also completed a high number of internal audits to continually monitor working practices and adherence to mandatory timescales and this could be an area of work which was reported on to the next Joint Committee meeting.</p> <p>Further to considering this agenda item, the Joint Committee members noted that Members enquiries related to children's services could be sent to Debbie Haith, Deputy Director for Children and Families.</p> <p>The Chair thanked officers for their attendance and contributions to the Joint meeting. It had been useful and worthwhile for the Committee to explore and discuss the areas of child protection which overlapped between the responsibilities of both Committees. Twice yearly meetings of the Corporate parenting Committee and Children's Safeguarding Policy and Practice Committee were planned and in the intervening periods the Committees would refer relevant issues to each other.</p>	<p>Clerk</p> <p>All to note</p>
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Cllr Lorna Reith

Chair