

Scrutiny Review: Child Friendly Haringey

A Review by the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel

2016/17

Panel Membership	Cllr Kirsten Hearn (Chair)
	Cllr Mark Blake
	Cllr Toni Mallett
	Cllr Liz Morris
	Cllr Reg Rice
	Uzma Naseer (Co-opted Member)
	Luci Davin (Co-opted Member)
	Ms Y Denny (Co-opted Member)
	Mr C Ekeowa (Co-opted Member)

Support Officer: Robert Mack, Principal Scrutiny Support Officer

Rob.mack@haringey.gov.uk

0208 489 2921

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CHAIR'S FOREWORD

What does Child friendly mean? Such laudable intentions don't always deliver. Failure can consign such notions to the bin of the worthy sound bite. We wanted to explore different models of so-called "Child Friendly" Councils to see if we could avoid the pitfalls associated with such wide-sweeping intentions and learn from others to inform what we might do, to deliver real change for all Haringey's children.

When applied to local authorities, "child friendly" generally means the process for the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This means ensuring that children know their rights, can access services when they need them and are involved in designing, implementing and evaluating services aimed at them. It also means making sure that services work with children rather than doing things for or to them. In addition, it recognises that children have a wide range of needs and wants which go beyond just the services specifically designed for them. Being "child friendly" invites politicians, Council workers, contractors and organisations delivering something on behalf of the people of the borough to always have at the front of their mind, "what is this service like for children", so that from street design to bin collections, from development of open spaces to the first point of contact, we bring children to the heart of all we do. That can only make what we do better for everyone.

The Panel has been inspired by the work that several other "child friendly" local authorities have undertaken. This has included a whole Council approach to committing to being child friendly, clear focussed objectives; engaging and involving children in making the Council "child friendly"; insisting that every worker from Councillors and the chief executive all the way through the organisation down, commits to the aim and acts to make it a reality. Adopting a similar approach in Haringey would make a real difference to the lives of Haringey's children. Action should also be taken to include partners and especially the voluntary sector in this.

Gains from becoming a "Child Friendly" borough will not be achieved overnight and will not happen unless partners are also on board. It is a long term process. It is also important that there is real substance and commitment to change within such an approach. Were the Council to also become a Unicef Child Rights Partner, this would assist with the development of a meaningful strategy and provide robust external challenge, thus providing firm foundations. It would also provide accreditation and therefore additional recognition of the progress that has been made by the Council in recent years.

The Council's ultimate ambition should be to ensure that Haringey becomes a truly great place to grow up in. Becoming a "Child Friendly" borough puts the ambition at the forefront of future plans for children and young people in Haringey. In becoming child friendly, we commit wherever we encounter children, to do our utmost to protect and promote their human rights, no matter or who they are or the difficult circumstances they present to us with.



Kirsten Hearn
Chair

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the Council declares its intention to become a “Child Friendly” borough, with this approach embedded in everything that the Council does and driven by strong political and officer commitment.
2. That a “Child Friendly borough” strategy be developed for Haringey and that this includes the following:
 - A clear local vision of what a “Child Friendly” borough should look like;
 - Enhanced arrangements for listening and responding effectively to the voice of the child;
 - Engagement of children in the design, implementation and evaluation of services designed for them;
 - Child impact assessments and evaluation to be considered within proposed new policies and reviews or change to existing policies;
 - Action to ensure that children know their rights; and
 - A coordinating mechanism.
3. That, as part of the development of a “Child Friendly” strategic approach, engagement take place with partners and the voluntary sector in order to secure their collaboration.
4. That an application be made by the Council to become a Unicef Child Rights Partner.
5. That the following issues, based on feedback and performance information, are key priorities for children and young people in the Council’s new Young People’s Strategy and the focus of any projects developed as part of the Unicef Child Rights Partners scheme;
 - Community safety for young people and, in particular ensuring that they are able to travel safely around the borough;
 - Youth facilities and activities which provide fun as well as opportunities for personal, educational and social development;
 - Mental health and the promotion of social and emotional well-being;
 - Housing and, in particular, the avoidance of homelessness; and
 - Reducing the percentage of children living in households living in poverty.

1. Background

- 1.1 As part of the work planning process for 2016/17, it was suggested that the Panel should look in depth at how Haringey could become a “child friendly” borough. This would include considering what would constitute a “child friendly” borough and the actions that might be required by the Council and its partners to achieve such a goal.

Terms of Reference

- 1.2 It was agreed that the terms of reference would be as follows:

“To consider and make recommendations on the feasibility of the Council declaring its intention to become a Child Friendly City, including;

- What it may entail;
- Potential benefits;
- Risks and resource issues; and
- What a scheme for Haringey might look like.”

Sources of Evidence:

- 1.3 Sources of evidence were:

- Research and policy documentation from Unicef and a number of different local authorities;
- Interviews with officers from the Council, other local authorities and Unicef;
- Consultation responses for a range of young people within Haringey; and
- Performance information.

- 1.4 A full list of all those who provided evidence is attached as Appendix A.

Membership

- 1.5 The membership of the Panel was as follows:

Councillors: Kirsten Hearn (Chair), Mark Blake, Toni Mallett, Liz Morris and Reg Rice.

Co-opted Members: Ms Uzma Naseer and Ms Luci Davin (Parent Governor representatives), Ms Y Denny and Mr E Ekeowa (Church representatives).

2. Introduction

- 2.1 A number of local authorities in the UK have undertaken initiatives that have aimed to make them become “child friendly”. These have included Leeds, Bristol, Calderdale and Brighton. Action to achieve this has focussed upon ensuring that children:
- Know their rights;
 - Can access services when they need them; and
 - Help to design, implement and evaluate services designed for them.
- 2.2 All of the initiatives undertaken have been inspired, to a greater or lesser degree, by the concept of “Child Friendly Cities”. This is the process for the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, led by local government. It is a global initiative led by Unicef (the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund), with the aim of fulfilling the right of every child and young person to participate in and express opinions on the city in which they live, safely, equally and with respect and influence.
- 2.3 The initiative has been running for 20 years and has covered 20 different countries and 195 local authorities. The objective of it is to embed children's rights into everything that local authorities do and improve the lives of children by “recognising and realising their rights”. It is envisaged as a practical process that must engage actively with children and their real lives. The concept is considered to be equally applicable to the governance of all communities which include children, irrespective of their size.
- 2.4 There is a Unicef framework dating from 2004 that is intended to provide a foundation for all localities. A Child Friendly City is expected to guarantee the right of every young citizen to:
- Influence decisions about their city;
 - Express their opinion on the city they want;
 - Participate in family, community and social life;
 - Receive basic services such as health care, education and shelter;
 - Drink safe water and have access to proper sanitation;
 - Be protected from exploitation, violence and abuse;
 - Walk safely in the streets on their own;
 - Meet friends and play;
 - Have green spaces for plants and animals;
 - Live in an unpolluted environment;
 - Participate in cultural and social events; and
 - Be an equal citizen of their city with access to every service, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, income, gender or disability.
- 2.5 The Unicef framework also contains “building blocks” to assist local authorities in developing their schemes and these may be more relevant to authorities in the UK. They provide an outline of what might be the necessary pre-requisites for becoming “child friendly”:
1. Children's participation;
 2. A child friendly legal framework;

3. A city wide Children's Right Strategy;
 4. A Children's Rights Unit or coordinating mechanism;
 5. Child impact assessment and evaluation;
 6. A children's budget;
 7. A regular "State of the Borough – Children" report;
 8. Making children's rights known; and
 9. Independent advocacy for children
- 2.6 Some local authorities in the UK have taken this original Unicef initiative and used it as a starting point for developing a framework of their own. Although schemes are focussed on local authorities, they have also involved active involvement from a range of partners as well as the voluntary sector. Some have also included private sector involvement.
- 2.7 The development of Child Friendly Cities is based on recognition that children have a wide range of wants and needs. They require a co-ordinated and strategic response from local authorities so the children's rights and the voice of the child are embedded in the full range of Council activities – not just Children's Services - as well as partnership bodies and governance.

Unicef

- 2.8 Until three years ago, the Child Friendly Cities initiative was based on the above mentioned generic framework. In recognition of the fact that some of the items on the list of children's rights were less relevant to cities in more highly developed countries, Unicef decided that the initiative would benefit from being more adaptable to local conditions.
- 2.9 A new scheme – Child Rights Partners – was developed for the UK and piloted with five local authorities. It was decided not to accredit authorities at this stage as the scheme was still under development. The local authorities that work was undertaken with were:
- Derry and Strabane;
 - Leeds
 - Tower Hamlets;
 - Newcastle; and
 - Glasgow
- 2.10 The Panel received evidence from Naomi Danquah from Unicef regarding their work. She reported that there is a perception that the role of Unicef is only concerned with aid for countries to the south of the globe. However, Unicef works globally and is a source of expertise for governments across the world. In the UK, their work covers fundraising and lobbying and, in addition, they have also promoted three programmes;
- The Baby Friendly initiative;
 - Rights Respecting Schools; and
 - Child Rights Partners.
- 2.11 The local authorities that were involved in the Child Rights Partners initiative did not want a prescriptive approach but instead wished to learn from each

other and fit their programme to local priorities The projects undertaken by each local authority varied considerably;

- Leeds took on a whole city approach as well as undertaking a specific project on care leavers;
- Derry and Strabane looked at embedding children's rights in their community plan and ensuring children and young people were involved in its development. They also undertook work to address sectarianism. Mapping took place of where children and young people from different communities went and funding was obtained to develop safe spaces designed by young people from all communities.
- Tower Hamlets initially undertook a focussed piece of work on commissioning of services for substance abuse;
- Glasgow focussed on early years. Professionals had found it difficult to challenge parents and joint training was arranged to develop a greater understanding; and
- Newcastle looked at applying a rights-based approach to their children's social care services. Children and young people also wrote a Children's Rights Charter that became the foundation of the Council's Children and Young People's Plan 2015-2020.

2.12 Ms Danquah stated that the initiative had helped to empower children and young people so they were better able to access services. Support had also been provided for staff so that they are able to develop better relationships and improvements made in how services communicate with each other. An evaluation of the pilot scheme was currently being undertaken by Queens University, Belfast. The wider Unicef Child Friendly Cities programme is also being re-modelled and New York has recently adopted the UK model. The aim is to have a standardised model that is contextualised to fit local conditions.

2.13 The Panel noted that from 2017, local authorities in the UK will be able to work towards accreditation from Unicef. Local authorities involved will have to take a whole authority approach and, in addition, select six specific areas to focus on at the start of the process. The initiative is intended to be a partnership between the local authority, young people and the third (voluntary) sector. Private sector involvement is also possible. Joint applications from a number of local authorities will be accepted. There are a number of areas that local authorities can focus their work on, such as political commitment, workforce knowledge and improving services. The choice of focus will depend on local issues and priorities.

2.14 Five local authorities will be selected initially. Ms Danquah emphasised the fact that it is not intended to be a "tick box" exercise and will require a strong commitment to change. The criterion for involvement are:

- Political commitment. It will require Cabinet sign off and not merely support from officers;
- The commitment shown needs to be both vertical and horizontal in terms of the organisation. There also needs to be a commitment to participation;
- There needs to be a governance group to oversee the process. This can be an existing group; and

- There needs to be evidence of a local vision and it cannot just be thoughtless commitment.
- 2.15 A fee of £25,000 will be payable by each local authority selected. Unicef are very much aware that this might prove to be a sticking point for many local authorities due to current budgetary issues. Local authorities will receive 40 days of Unicef time in return, including training, mentoring, use of resources and participation in networks. The aim is to build capacity within local authorities so that they are not reliant on Unicef. The scheme is to be launched in May 2017.
- 2.16 If more than 5 local authorities are interested in participating, involvement can be staggered. Where interest is expressed, Unicef will want to gain an understanding of where local authorities are and what projects they might be interested in pursuing. Although the deadline for expressions of interest was February, the initiative is ongoing so this will not preclude applications being made after this date.

3. Work by Other Local Authorities

- 3.1 There are a number of local authorities that describe themselves as “Child Friendly” but, whilst they all appear to be based on the Unicef concept, they have interpreted this in different ways. Whilst most of them are Unicef Child Rights Partners, there are some that are not and it is not necessarily a prerequisite.

Leeds City Council

- 3.2 The Unicef initiative was the inspiration behind the work that Leeds City Council have undertaken to become a “Child Friendly City” and they are also a Unicef Child Rights Partner. They have used this as a basis for developing a very ambitious scheme aimed at Leeds the best city in the UK to grow up in.
- 3.3 Extensive consultation with children and young people and local performance information was used to develop “12 wishes”. These are the issues and changes that children and young people felt that would make the most difference to their lives in Leeds:

Leeds City Council “12 Wishes”

1. Children and young people can make safe journeys and easily travel around the city.
2. Children and young people find the city centre welcoming and safe, with friendly places to go, have fun and play.
3. There are places and spaces to play and things to do, in all areas and open to all.
4. Children and young people can easily find out what they want to know, when they want it and how they want it.
5. Children, young people and adults have a good understanding of children’s rights, according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
6. Children and young people are treated fairly and feel respected.
7. Children and young people have the support and information they need to make healthy lifestyle choices.
8. All our learning places identify and address the barriers that prevent children and young people from engaging in and enjoying learning.
9. There are a greater number of better quality jobs, work experience opportunities and good quality careers advice for all.
10. All children and young people have their basic rights met.
11. Children and young people express their views, feel heard and are actively involved in decisions that affect their lives.
12. Places and spaces where children and young people spend time and play are free of litter and dog fouling.

- 3.4 The instigation for the development of Child Friendly Leeds came from the current Director of Children's Services. When appointed, he had stated his ambition to make Leeds a "child friendly city" and the work that had been undertaken subsequently was driven by this.
- 3.5 The Council's Children and Young People's Plan 2015-19 outlined the five outcomes that the Council was seeking to achieve in respect of children. These are:
- All children and young people are safe from harm;
 - All children and young people do well at all levels of learning and have skills for life;
 - All children and young people enjoy healthy lifestyles;
 - All children and young people have fun growing up; and
 - All children and young people are active citizens who feel they have a voice and influence.
- 3.6 There has been a consistent focus on these. There are 14 priorities below these outcomes;
1. Help children to live in safe and supportive families;
 2. Ensure that the most vulnerable are protected;
 3. Improve achievement and close achievement gaps;
 4. Increase numbers participating and engaging;
 5. Improve outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disability;
 6. Support children to have the best start in life and be ready for learning;
 7. Support schools and settings to improve attendance and develop positive behaviour;
 8. Encourage physical activity and healthy eating;
 9. Promote sexual health;
 10. Minimise the misuse of drugs, alcohol and tobacco;
 11. Provide play, leisure, culture and sporting opportunities;
 12. Improve social, emotional and mental health and well being;
 13. Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour; and
 14. Increase participation, voice and influence.
- 3.7 In addition, 3 "obsessions" had been identified on which there is relentless focus;
- Safely and appropriately reduce the number of children who are looked after;
 - Reduce the number of young people not in education, employment and training; and
 - Improve school attendance.
- 3.8 Three behaviours have underpinned their strategy;
- Listening and responding to the voice of the child;
 - Restorative Practice: doing with, not for or to;
 - Outcomes based accountability: is anyone better off?

- 3.9 The current figures for looked after children are currently the best that they had ever been, with a 14% drop in numbers. The authority had previously been something of an outlier in terms of their number of looked after children. £20 million has now been saved from this budget. In addition, they currently had their lowest NEET rate ever, although they acknowledged that more improvements needed to be made. There has also been a very large reduction in the number of children and young people not in school.
- 3.10 Whilst there had been some adjustments to their strategy, there has been a strong and consistent message. Work has also been undertaken with local businesses to assist in promoting the child friendly approach. There are also 600 child friendly Leeds ambassadors, who come from a wide cross section of the city, including schools and the third sector.
- 3.11 There has been a large amount of learning and development work that has taken place to develop restorative practice, with over 8,000 professionals trained across the city, including NHS officers and refuse collectors. The restorative approach needs to be adopted by everyone and this started at the top.
- 3.12 The use of family group conferences (FGCs) has been expanded from 30 per year to 50 per month. This is a simple but effective model of social care practice that involves sitting down with families to identify solutions jointly. They felt that there had been very positive outcomes from this. They emphasised that it requires a large amount of preparation times and the input of skilled people.
- 3.13 Leeds have also undertaken strong workforce development. There are now only 11 agency social workers out of a work force of 300. There had previously been a large number of newly qualified social workers but many of these have stayed with the authority and the benefits of this are now starting to be seen. There is a deliberate policy of progression and it is possible for staff to begin as students and finish up as director.
- 3.14 The authority has four dedicated officers in its Voice, Influence and Change team who have a role in developing the voice of the child and spreading its influence. There is a Student LSCB that has been running for 18 months and whose purpose is to provide a children and young people's perspective on the work of the LSCB and advise on the most effective methods for engaging children and young people in safeguarding topics. There was also a children in care council and a care leavers council. Whilst there was a no youth council youth, there was a youth forum, which met quarterly. The last forum meeting had involved over 180 primary school children.
- 3.15 There is a children's mayor, who is elected by Year 6 children. Children who are standing wrote a manifesto which is then put to the vote. 35,000 children had voted in the last election. The person elected presents their manifesto to full Council, which was responded to by officers.

- 3.16 Officers from Leeds stated that it was not just about listening to the voice of children but ensuring that they had influence, which is more difficult. Work is undertaken to ensure that the feedback that is obtained was representative of the city as a whole and areas where there is under representation are targeted. They felt that it is necessary to have a skilled and committed team to support this work.
- 3.17 The progress that has been made by Leeds has been recognised by OFSTED. They had previously been assessed as inadequate in an inspection of safeguarding and Looked After Children that took place in 2010 and had an Improvement Notice placed on them. Following this, a wholesale service restructure took place with a new Senior Leadership Team appointed and a new strategic vision for children's services in the city developed, which was "Child Friendly Leeds". The Improvement Notice was lifted in 2011. In 2015, the authority was inspected again and rated as "good".
- 3.18 There is strong cross part support for the child friendly approach. Members understand that they have an important role to play, particularly in listening to children and young people. The authority is committed to the strategy and has held its nerve when there had been challenges. They had invested in family group conferences and workforce development. Whilst £20 million had been saved through their approach, their budget had gone down more quickly than this. The authority is also trying to manage better the placement of looked after children out of the area.
- 3.19 In respect of the Unicef Child Rights Partners initiative, they had been involved for three years and, whilst this had been an interesting experience, it had not been without its challenges. Unicef had had an international perspective and some of this did not translate well. Whilst they had been glad to be involved, they have decided not to continue, particularly as a charge is being introduced.
- 3.20 The feedback that had been obtained from children and young people, as outlined in the "12 Wishes" had enabled them to challenge other services and partners to respond to issues that were not directly the responsibility of their service.

Tower Hamlets

- 3.21 Tower Hamlets began working with Unicef in 2013 through their Children and Families Partnership Board. Unicef had approached Tower Hamlets due to the borough's high levels of child poverty. A visit was made to Tower Hamlets on behalf of the Panel to hear the views of officers who had been involved in the initiative there.
- 3.22 They stated that the theoretical model used by Unicef was similar to the approach used in Every Child Matters. Tower Hamlets had been tasked with coming up with a project to focus their activity on and selected commissioning

as it was felt that this was an area where they could do better. The area of commissioning that was chosen initially for the work was substance misuse. The Unicef approach involved looking at the needs of children holistically and this is now embedded in their practice. They had found that fewer young people are now exiting substance misuse services early but it is possible that this is due a particularly good provider being appointed.

- 3.23 The Council's Corporate Parenting Board had also re-examined its engagement and participation practices using the child rights based approach. It was found that younger children were not accessing the children in care council. As a result of this, there are now two children in care councils in Tower Hamlets – one for the young children and one for the remainder. In addition, many children are placed outside the borough and a shortfall in engaging with them had been identified. The provider had therefore been asked to work with relevant children and young people and involve them in a national advocacy scheme. Extra money was provided for the commissioning of the service to provide for the additional engagement identified as being necessary.
- 3.24 The child rights approach is now part of commissioning for all children's services. It had also been incorporated into the strategic planning for the development of their Children and Young People's Plan. The Unicef seven child rights principles had provided the analysis framework for the needs assessment. These are:
- Dignity;
 - Participation;
 - Life, survival and development;
 - Non-discrimination;
 - Transparency and accountability;
 - Best interest; and
 - Interdependence and indivisibility.
- 3.25 It was felt that the Child Rights Partner initiative had brought a lot of benefits to Tower Hamlets. It had enabled a shared language to be developed in respect of children's rights. Unicef also brought a lot of expertise and added value to the work that had been done by the Council. In particular, they had provided a lot of training and support, which was considered to be of excellent quality. They felt that they were now better able to meet the needs of children and young people and deliver improved outcomes as services are targeted more effectively.
- 3.26 Although it was felt that the child rights approach was sound, it had been a challenge to generate an understanding of it internally. It could appear overly academic but professionals involved in children's social care tended to understand what it is about. They felt that the approach would not necessarily cost more and can lead to better outcomes for children and young people. Training is a very large element of the process and it was felt that Unicef are outstanding in delivering this. All commissioners had now been trained in the approach.

- 3.27 It was felt that there may be a need to commit resources in excess of the £25,000 that UNICEF are asking for future participation as a Child Rights Partners though. In particular, it would require someone to administer and co-ordinate the work internally.

Derry and Strabane

- 3.28 The Panel heard that Derry had had Unicef Child Friendly City status for a number of years and had focussed its work relating to this on promoting play and engagement. Unicef had then changed the focus of the Child Friendly City initiative in the UK with the introduction of the pilot Child Rights Partners scheme, which they had also participated in.
- 3.29 Local government in Northern Ireland had been restructured in 2015 and Derry and Strabane were brought together as a consequence of this. New Northern Irish legislation had also created a need for community planning. Derry and Strabane had made ensuring that their plan met the needs of children and young people a key objective. As part of the development process, they had gone out into the community to consult with young people on what the important issues were for them and how they felt that they could best be addressed. This had been done through a series of workshops. The role of local government had been explained using images and the Child Rights approach had been central to their work.
- 3.30 Including hard-to-reach groups had proven to be a challenge. It had been felt to be particularly important that there was representation from communities suffering from significant social disadvantage. Neighbourhood renewal and the youth service had assisted with helping to identify suitable young people. The neighbourhood renewal process focussed on the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland and was aimed at assisting with the transformation from conflict to peace. There had been a lot of community engagement as a part of this, with the aim of bringing people from different communities together. This had worked well as there was a shared agenda in addressing deprivation.
- 3.31 They felt that involving children and young people in the community planning process had been the key success of their child friendly initiatives but there had been challenges in bringing about policy change and getting buy-in from senior management.
- 3.32 As part of the Child Rights Partners process with Unicef, training had been undertaken with elected Members and senior management and this had translated well into action. It had not been possible to just go through the motions as part of this process. They had the highest respect for Unicef and did not think that the work that they had undertaken would have got off the ground without their input. They felt that Unicef had been quite “hands off” in their approach. The Council had needed to come up with solutions themselves and Unicef had helped them by making them think.

Bristol

- 3.33 Bristol's child friendly initiative differs at it is very much a community generated initiative, with the voluntary sector and higher education institutions taking a prominent role. The local authority does not take a leading role. It is co-ordinated by the Bristol Child Friendly City network, which was initiated by three community organisations, in partnership with the University of Bristol. It is described as being inspired by the Unicef Friendly Cities initiative. The priorities of the Bristol initiative are based around the built environment and the development of a democratic voice for children and young people. It is well regarded locally and is felt to have influenced policy and planning.
- 3.34 The aims for Bristol Child Friendly City are to promote action and change so that all children are better considered in the physical and democratic 'space' of Bristol. This is underpinned by wider initiatives to create a safer, healthier, more equal and connected city for everyone.
- 3.35 Following consultation with voluntary and statutory organisations, children, young people and academics in 2015, a three part vision was developed, consisting of longer term aims, each with an 'action for change' that can be achieved in the shorter term. These are as follows:
1. All children have safe, independent mobility and access to the city of Bristol and its resources, including streets, communities, green space, the city centre, play, sport, arts, culture/youth culture. Children will have richer, healthier lives where they can discover, connect, pursue interests and abilities, play, learn, enjoy, participate and grow up with a sense of belonging and ownership. Children will be more present and visible, creating a truly inter-generational city. Focus for action/change: Free bus travel for under 16's in Bristol
 2. All children feel heard and have a say in decision making on things that affect their lives. Children will grow up to feel more trusted, equal, active citizens and engaged, empowered adults. Bristol will benefit from their unique perspectives and contributions, both now and in the future. Focus for action/change: 16 year olds able to vote in mayoral elections. Effective routes identified for civic/democratic participation of under 14's.
 3. Adults in positions of power make decisions with all children in mind. The planning of new places, spaces and initiatives will consider the needs of children. Bristol will be better for children and people of all ages, and more accountable to young citizens. Focus for action/change: Children become a key consideration in any strategic city processes."

The Welsh Government

- 3.36 The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has been adopted by the Welsh government as the basis of policy making for children and young people and this was now enshrined in law there. It made a specific commitment to improving the lives of children and young people and stated its aim to provide opportunities and experience for them to grow, to ensure that they know and understand about their rights and that there is help for them as and when they

need it. They introduced the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure in 2011 and this embeds consideration of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into law.

- 3.37 The Measure places a duty on Welsh Ministers to have due regard to The United Nations Convention. It applies to decisions of the Welsh Ministers about any of the following:
- Proposed new legislation;
 - Proposed new policies; and
 - A review of or change to an existing policy and/or legislation.
- 3.38 A Children's Rights Scheme was developed under the Measure and this includes the need the undertake Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) in respect of any of the above. It is felt that the scheme encourages consideration of the wider impacts of work outside specific policy areas.

4. Haringey

4.1 In undertaking its work, the Panel considered the areas that might be prioritised for action as part of a “Child Friendly” strategy. The Panel heard from officers in the Children and Young People’s Service about what are the key areas for Haringey, based on performance information:

- Haringey is the 28th most deprived local authority area in the country and the 6th most in London. Conversely, the borough is also contains some of the least deprived wards in the country;
- When housing costs are taken into account, one third of the borough’s children are living in poverty, which is the 9th highest level in London. Haringey households have been affected significantly by the cumulative impact of welfare reform. The number impacted is 22,696 (20%) households;
- The number of looked after children has steadily declined from a peak of 610 in 2011 to its current level of 429. It is nevertheless still above the average for London and England;
- The highest single cause of referrals to social care is domestic violence (22%), followed by physical abuse (16%). There are a growing number of referrals due to homelessness. However, neglect is the biggest cause of children being taken into care (14%).
- 95.3% of primary schools and 100% of secondary schools were now rated a good or outstanding. Of particular note was the fact that the educational achievement of looked after children was consistently amongst the best in the country.

4.2 The Panel noted that there is not currently a specific overarching strategy in respect of the promotion of children’s rights issues. However, there is a Young People’s Strategy as well as a Youth Offer, although a lot of resources have been lost in recent years. Action has also been taken to capture the voice of the child although it was acknowledged that this could be improved. In particular, there is the Haringey Youth Council, which has recently been reconstituted. There is also Aspire, which acts as the borough’s children in care council. It was noted that the Youth Council includes representation from children with disabilities. In terms of looked after children, the Independent Reviewing Officer is required to provide challenge and ensure that the rights of children were observed.

4.3 Officers reported that schools have their own systems for promoting children’s rights and some use the UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools framework. This can include the use of young people as mediators, many of whom had proven to be very effective. In respect of looked after children, there was the London wide pledge for children and young people in care, which Haringey has signed up to.

- 4.4 In respect of the evidence that had been received by the Panel from Leeds, it was felt that there was substance behind their child friendly initiatives. They have progressed from being challenged to stability and, in addition, they are also now able to say that they no longer have specific thresholds. The whole process had taken six years in total. Consideration was now given to the potential impact of all Council decisions on children. In addition, the “three obsessions” within the Children and Young People’s Plan had helped to focus action.
- 4.5 In terms of Haringey, officers felt that a “quick win” would be to get the Council thinking corporately about children’s issues. Child and young people are affected by and require a wide range of public services and it was felt there was a need to broaden the sense of responsibility.
- 4.6 The Panel noted that the Corporate Plan has one more year remaining and plans are being put to place to develop the new one. Officers felt that a child friendly focus could be fed into these discussions. Political and senior management commitment would be of particular importance in taking this forward. The approach could be adapted so that it was more specific to Haringey and incorporating local initiatives, such as Signs of Safety which is the model of children’s social care that is currently used. A child friendly approach need not have cost implications – it could focus on the resources that the Council had and how these could be used to best effect. It could also assist in generating commitment. In addition, an ambassador scheme such as that which was in operation in Leeds, with a role in engaging with the community, could also have potential in Haringey.

5. Feedback from Children and Young People in Haringey

- 5.1 The Panel obtained feedback from a range of children and young people in Haringey on the issues that are of importance to them. This was inspired by the work undertaken by Leeds City Council in developing their “12 Wishes”.

Haringey Youth Council

- 5.2 At the first meeting of the re-constituted Haringey Youth Council, young people debated the issues that were of most concern to them. The three biggest concerns were identified as follows:

1. Crime and gangs
2. Youth clubs and activities for young people
3. Mental health

- 5.3 It is envisaged that, once the Youth Council's Terms of Reference are finalised and adopted, future meetings will involve input from the lead officers for these areas within the Council to ensure that the Youth Council's views are integral to service planning.

- 5.4 The Panel also submitted a number of specific questions to the Youth Council and the responses were as follows:

- *What would make Haringey a better place for you to live and grow up in?*
 1. Better access to youth centres and free activities for young people to attend in the evenings after school and weekends.
 2. At the moment there is only one council youth club (Bruce Grove) open three days a week and it is only in one area which is not accessible for all young people in Haringey to get too.
 3. If the community were more involved in helping to organise itself
- *What sort of things would make you feel safer in Haringey?*
 1. More visible Police presence but police that are from Haringey and who have a knowledge of local young people.
 2. TSG officers to be less aggressive
 3. More street lights for e.g. at the basket ball courts
- *What do you think would improve the mental health of young people?*
 1. Easy access to services for mental health problems
 2. Online booking facilities for appointments
 3. Modern apps that young people can download access to services in a contemporary way
- *In what way could activities and facilities available for young people in Haringey be improved?*
 1. More funding and a wider range of activities available for young people to take part in
 2. Mentoring opportunities for young people to have one to one support

- *How could the views of young people best be obtained by decision makers? (e.g. through meetings/social media etc.)*
1. Put questions directly to the Youth Council
 2. Questions can also be put directly to secondary and primary schools where opinions can canvassed on a wide range of subjects. If the questions are specific the whole borough can be feasibly asked.

Aspire

- 5.5 The Panel met with and obtained feedback from Aspire, who are Haringey's Children in Care Council. Aspire members present stated that their priorities were to have fun and be safe and, in particular, to be able to get around without any problems.
- 5.6 They stated that a lot of young people do not feel safe and are worried about gangs. Some are reluctant to travel to other areas of the borough away from where they live due to the "post code" issue. Officers referred to a recent visit that was made to Nandos in Wood Green as a treat for Aspire members where one young person from Aspire had needed to be escorted to safety by member of staff due to concern for his safety. Officers also reported that the post code issue can affect the life chances of young people as they can be reticent to go to other areas for education or training.
- 5.7 Other issues that arose were:
- Street lighting in some areas was felt to be not bright enough. In particular, areas on some housing estates could be dimly lit;
 - There were not enough youth clubs. These allowed young people to meet and make friends;
 - Housing could be a big issue for young people leaving care. They had access to a lot of support when in care, particularly from social workers, and could find it difficult when this was no longer available. Housing services did not appear to make any allowances for them being young or having been in care and it could be very stressful dealing with them.
- 5.8 It was felt that the best way to engage with children and young people was to use social media. Officers commented that how people spoke to young people was important in being able to get messages across.

The Markfield Project

- 5.9 Feedback was also received from the Markfield Project, who met with young people on their Youth Steering Group. They raised the following issues as being important to them:
- Safety rated very highly in the young peoples' priorities;
 - Mental health support was also an important area;
 - Money/work was an issue for all young people and they stated the need for apprenticeships and work opportunities;
 - Inclusion was thought to be of key importance for disabled young people and society generally;

- Social opportunities and fun was an area that came up throughout the discussion, particularly in relation to the needs of disabled young people. The young people wanted to see more youth clubs and activities for young people that promoted choice and independence; and
- Housing and local environment was also an important issue for our young people. They talked of the need for better cleanliness in the streets, less vandalism, litter and generally having a nicer environment. They felt better housing was also needed. Safety arose again in this discussion and one young person said “Living in Broadwater Farm doesn’t feel safe.”

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 6.1 The Panel is of the view that adopting a “Child Friendly” ethos could have a number of potential benefits for Haringey;
- The development of an enhanced corporate focus on children’s issues;
 - The potential to deliver better outcomes for children and young people by developing, through improved engagement, services that are more responsive to their needs; and
 - A greater emphasis on the key areas that may assist the borough in obtaining a “good” Ofsted rating for relevant services.
- 6.2 The Panel also noted the evidence from Leeds that becoming “Child Friendly” was not incompatible with the need to save money. Savings of £20 million were made by Leeds through a substantial reduction in the number of looked after children and it was felt that this may have been at least in part to their “Child Friendly” approach and its strong emphasis on working together with children and families to find solutions.
- 6.3 The Panel feels that there would be benefit in the Council aiming to become a “Child Friendly” borough, with this approach embedded in everything that the Council does and driven by strong and wide ranging political and officer commitment.

Recommendation 1:

That the Council declares its intention to become a “Child Friendly” borough, with this approach embedded in everything that the Council does and driven by strong political and officer commitment.

- 6.4 The new Young People’s Strategy should be developed to support the Council’s aspiration to become a “Child Friendly” borough. It is important that becoming “Child Friendly” is a meaningful process with genuine substance and commitment to change behind it. Plans within the Strategy to become a “Child Friendly” borough should therefore include the following elements, which are based on the Unicef framework;
- A clear local vision of what a “Child Friendly” borough should look like;
 - Enhanced arrangements for listening and responding effectively to the voice of the child;
 - Engagement of children in the design, implementation and evaluation of services designed for them;
 - Child impact assessments and evaluation to be considered within proposed new policies and reviews or change to existing policies;
 - Action to ensure that children know their rights; and
 - A coordinating mechanism.
- 6.5 Although it has been very impressed by the work undertaken by Leeds, The Panel nevertheless believes that a Haringey model should be adopted that reflects the needs, characteristics and aspirations of the local area. In

particular, Haringey has its own model of social care practice, which is called Signs of Safety and also follows a collaborative approach.

Recommendation 2:

That a “Child Friendly borough” strategy be developed for Haringey and that this includes the following:

- *A clear local vision of what a “Child Friendly” borough should look like;*
- *Enhanced arrangements for listening and responding effectively to the voice of the child;*
- *Engagement of children in the design, implementation and evaluation of services designed for them;*
- *Child impact assessments and evaluation to be considered within proposed new policies and reviews or change to existing policies;*
- *Action to ensure that children know their rights; and*
- *A coordinating mechanism.*

- 6.6 The Panel feels that action to enable Haringey to become a “Child Friendly” borough will have a greater chance of success if it is not just a Council initiative but involves a range of partners. The Panel would therefore recommend that action be taken to secure the collaboration of partners and, in particular, the voluntary sector.

Recommendation 3:

That, as part of the development of a “Child Friendly” strategic approach, engagement take place with partners and the voluntary sector in order to secure their collaboration.

- 6.7 The Panel also recommends that consideration be given to applying to become a Unicef Child Rights Partner. The Panel is mindful that there would be cost implications arising from this but is of the view that this would provide a number of benefits, including highly rated training, external challenge and the opportunity to achieve accreditation, which would provide a benchmark of the progress that has been made by the Council. In addition, it would give great standing to the Council’s “Child Friendly” scheme and help ensure that it does not become a “tick box” exercise. Becoming a Child Rights Partner would also provide access to a network of other authorities and the opportunity to share learning through this.
- 6.8 There are a number of options that could be explored for the development of the application, including partnerships with the voluntary sector, private sector involvement and a joint application with other boroughs. However, active involvement of children and young people should be a pre-requisite of any application.

Recommendation 4:

That an application be made by the Council to become a Unicef Child Rights Partner.

- 6.9 The Panel has also considered the issues that should be focussed on as part of a “Child Friendly” strategy. It has based this on feedback received from children and young people on what would make Haringey a better place for them to live and grow up in as well as performance information. The following would appear to be the priority areas for children and young people in the borough;
- Community safety. The Panel has heard from young people on a number of occasions about their concerns relating to community safety, violence and especially the “post code” issue that exists in some parts of the borough. This would appear to be a source of worry and, in some cases, risk for many young people. The Panel is particularly concerned at the possibility that it may be adversely affecting the life chances of some young people through deterring them from taking up opportunities in other parts of the borough. Although reference is made to safety in the current Young People’s strategy, it is acknowledged that improvements could be made in work to address this issue;
 - Youth facilities and activities. Play, leisure, culture and sport are not only fun but also very important aspects in the development of young people. Unfortunately, youth facilities have suffered as a consequence of cuts made necessary by austerity but it is clear from the feedback from young people that they feel that more priority now needs to be given to them;
 - Mental health. There has been a large increase nationally in demand for mental health services for children and young people in recent years, which services have struggled to cope with. In particular, depression and anxiety have increased by 70% in the past 25 years. Haringey has also historically had disproportionately high levels of mental illness. The inclusion of the issue in the top three concerns of members of Haringey Youth Council shows that it is now a very real concern for many young people;
 - Housing. The Panel heard evidence of the increasingly adverse impact that housing need is having on children and young people. This came both from feedback from young people – especially care leavers - and performance information, which showed an increasing number of referrals to social care due to homelessness; and
 - Poverty. Some areas of Haringey are still amongst the poorest in the UK and action is still clearly required to address this. Giving disadvantaged children the best possible start in life greatly increases their chances of escaping poverty.
- 6.10 Many, if not all, of the above areas are not just the responsibility of the Council but also of a range of partners. A clear strategic focus on them and the fact that they are supported by feedback from children and young people could enable the Council to challenge partners more effectively.

- 6.11 The Panel would also recommend that, should the Council proceed with its application to become a Unicef Child Rights Partner, the specific areas selected for project work reflect the above mentioned priorities.

Recommendation 5:

That the following issues, based on feedback and performance information, are key priorities for children and young people in the Council's new Young People's Strategy and from the focus of projects that may be developed as part of the Unicef Child Rights Partners scheme:

- Community safety for young people and, in particular ensuring that they are able to travel safely around the borough;
- Youth facilities and activities which provide fun as well as opportunities for personal, educational and social development;
- Mental health and the promotion of social and emotional well-being;
- Housing and, in particular, the avoidance of homelessness; and
- Reducing the percentage of children living in households living in poverty.

Appendix A

Participants in the Review:

Naomi Danquah – Unicef

Bonnie Curran - Bristol City Council

Sue Rumbold, Andy Lloyd Head and Jane Kaye – Leeds City Council

Wesley Hedger – London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Helen Harley and John Meehan – Derry and Strabane District Council

Haringey Youth Council

Aspire

Youth Steering Group - The Markfield Project

Jon Abbey and Gill Gibson – Haringey Children and Young People's Service