

CHILDREN AND LEARNING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ANNUAL REPORT 2013-2014

SUMMARY

This report is the annual report of the Committee, summarising the Committee's activities during the past Council year.

It is planned for this report to stand as a public record of achievement for the year and enable members and others to compare performance year to year.

There are no direct equalities or environmental implications attached to this covering report. Any financial implications from reviews and work undertaken will be advised as part of the specific reviews.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Council note the 2013/2014 Children & Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report and the 2013/2014 Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report.

REPORT DETAILS

During the year under review, the Committee met on 8 occasions and dealt with the following issues:

1. New OFSTED Education Inspection Framework

- 1.1 The Committee considered the item on three occasions during 2013/2014. A report was initially presented to the Committee in June 2013 which detailed the OFSTED inspection framework that came into effect on 1 June 2013. The framework explained the basis for the inspection of Local Authority arrangements for supporting school improvements and the education of children and young people. The aim was to assist local authorities in their duty to promote high standards in schools and academies and included training and other education providers (including colleges) so that all children and young people received a good education. It was a legal requirement of all local

authorities to promote high standards of education and that their statutory duties also included the following:

- To provide fair access to opportunity of education and training
- To promote the fulfilment of learning potential for every person under 20 years and under 25 years who were subject to a learning difficulty assessment
- To work with education partners including all head teachers and governors
- To promote prevention, early intervention, and narrow the gaps, and ensure the wider wellbeing of children and young people
- To promote the interests of children, young people, parents and families and to stimulate and support a diversity of school, early years and 16-19 provision
- To promote educational excellence for all children and young people including tackling underperformance

1.2 OFSTED inspections would not be universal as OFSTED would only inspect where there were concerns about performance, or at the request of the Secretary of State. Following a provision of five days' notice, an inspection process would commence where a number of key judgements would be applied.

1.3 The inspection process would involve meetings with Local Authority officers including the Chief Executive and the Director of Children's Services. There would be further meetings with the Lead Member as well as with Overview and Scrutiny members. OFSTED would also meet with Head Teachers and Governors and would interview representatives from other groups such as the Children's Trust, Schools Funding Forum, Local Safeguarding Children's Board and the Education Strategic Partnership. In addition, OFSTED would talk to representatives in all school categories including academies and free schools to determine what Local Authority support they receive.

1.4 The Authority would also be judged on the following:-

- The provision of effective and strategic leadership to education providers
- The clarity and transparency of policy
- The knowledge of education providers, their performance and practice.
- Effective identification of underperforming providers and intervention
- Improving education providers and narrowing geographical and pupil performance gaps.

1.5 Other areas that would be inspected are promotion of support between governing bodies and how the use of funds effect improvements in areas of greatest need. There would be a written report that would be published resulting in the Authority being judged effective or not effective.

1.6 Members were informed that the Authority's relevant processes and documentation were currently being reviewed and included Havering's Strategic Education Policy and the Havering Self Evaluation Form.

- 1.7 In December 2013 the Committee held a special meeting to participate in a practical training exercise relating to the Self Evaluation Form for OFSTED inspections. Members were given certain tasks where there were a number of possible aspects that OFSTED may investigate and had to provide their suggestions for an Evidence Base. The Committee found the exercise very informative. The Committee noted that an action plan would be in place by January 2014 and that a final draft would be forwarded to all education providers in early 2014. The Committee requested sight of the final Self Evaluation Document at the March 2014 meeting.

2 Children and Young People's Plan

- 2.1 In June 2013, the Committee received a detailed update on the Children's and Young People Plan 2011-2014. The paper was presented as an overview of the final year of the current plan and a new plan would be formulated for a further three years from 2014. Partner agencies, including those from the Police, Health, Education and voluntary sectors had collaborated well to deliver against the shared priorities. The Committee noted that progress had been made in six key priority areas which were:

- (i) Ensuring children and young people are protected from abuse and neglect. A number of processes were in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people which included strengthening multi-agency working practices, improved participation of families and professionals utilising the right tools and procedures for the specific needs of the child.
- (ii) Increase breastfeeding. Havering's initiation and continuation rates remained below London and national averages although they were now in line with statistical neighbours. At the last 6-8 week check, continuation rates had increased from 39% to 43 %. It was hoped that the initiatives introduced would result in an increase to 47% which was the national average.
- (iii) Reduce child poverty. Nearly one in five Havering children less than 16 years of age lived in poverty which was lower than many London Boroughs but higher than the Council's statistical neighbours. Child poverty had fallen in the last year however this was due to the decrease in median wage. A range of activities was underway in collaboration with partners to address the causes of poverty which included:
 - a) developing a network of integrated services for families focusing on Foundation Years
 - b) reducing barriers to employment
 - c) improving financial wellbeing
 - d) addressing health inequalities
- (iv) Reduce teenage conceptions and termination rates

Before the introduction of the current prevention strategy in 2010,

Havering's local conception figures were worryingly high with 190 conceptions in 2009. In 2011, this had fallen to 131 conceptions which were below the national and regional rates. This was due to the effectiveness of the co-ordinated partnership working to achieve this result. Initiatives that remained in place were access to contraceptive and sexual health services including the Condom Card, targeted work with vulnerable groups and workforce development.

(v) Support complex families

Havering had already designed a project (Top 100 families) to help meet this objective which placed the borough in a good position when the Government launched its Troubled Families programme. Troubled Families has had a positive impact in driving closer collaboration between partners including schools, health, CAMHS and Job Centre Plus to ensure that the needs of the family were met as a whole rather than piecemeal. The Troubled Families programme is now informing development of early help services. Representatives from the Department for Communities and Local Government had visited the borough in January 2013 and had noted the progress made by Havering.

(vi) Improve access to high quality therapies

Access to effective therapies had been a concern for all and the activity for this priority has included re-design of services, improved commissioning and collaboration with partners. One good example of this has been the new wheelchair contract with NELFT which has made a huge difference to the speed in which disabled children get the wheelchairs they need to fully participate in school and family and community life. The committee was also advised about the newly introduced CAMHS triage service which has reduced waiting times for children and families and makes sure that those working with children have access to timely advice.

3 Annual Cabinet Performance Report 2012-2013

3.1 In September 2013, the Committee considered the sections relating to Children and Learning in the Annual Cabinet Performance Report for 2012-2013. The Committee expressed their concerns over the method of target setting and questioned whether these were always sufficiently stretching.

3.2 Early Years

The Early Years provision of good or better (as evaluated by Ofsted) settings was 76.4% which was 3% above target and an improvement on last year. The Committee were advised that there were private companies/individuals providing early year care and although they were subject to robust quality assurance, they were not local authority maintained and therefore the Authority had no control. A Quality Assurance team had been retained by the Local Authority to check on their provision. It was noted that there would be an increase of 500 places for this year.

3.3 Apprenticeships

The 14-19 Partnership had set a target of 500 apprentices to be recruited as part of a three year programme and that 242 had already been recruited in the first quarter.

3.4 Children's placement stability

The council had set a target 75% in 2012-2013 for long term placement stability. Although this was not reached, the 63% outturn was a significant improvement on the previous year's outturn of 49.1%. Members were advised that improvements were continuing to be made in placement stability.

3.5 Learning

It was noted that performance at Key Stage 4, pupils achieving 5 or more A* - C grades had improved significantly with current annual performance at 65.2%.

3.6 NEET

The Committee were advised that the government had changed the processes in calculating NEET. Every young person who counts as unknown is marked as being NEET. It was noted that performance was better than target although slightly worse than last year. A target of 4.9% had been set for 2013/14 which was allowing for 3000 additional 17 year olds to be factored in.

3.7 Child Protection Plans

It was noted that there had been an increase in Child Protection Plans however the duration of these had remained relatively short. In the current financial year, there had only been one child who became subject of a Child Protection Plan for the second or subsequent time within two years. The Authority's performance was better than target for 2012/2013.

3.8 Teenage Pregnancies

Teenage pregnancies have continued to fall and were standing at 27.9 per 1000 at the time of the latest available data (2011) Steps taken to reduce pregnancies included practical services, most notably advice services available across the borough along with the very successful Condom Card Scheme. The Committee was concerned that efforts towards further reductions in teenage pregnancy and improvements in sexual health should continue to have high priority.

3.9 Adoption

It was noted that the authority had not performed well in 2011 -2012 but performance overall was improving. Members were assured that adoption

improvement, especially in respect of better timescales is and will continue to be an area of priority.

4 School Places Strategy

- 4.1 The Committee raised questions for clarification regarding the perception about the number of schools that had been approached to take “bulge classes” and questioned forecasting procedures. The Committee also enquired what steps were being taken to ensure applications for Havering Schools were from legitimate Havering residents.
- 4.2 It was noted that Authority paid for a system that carried out checks on residency. There was a pan London admissions system operated within the primary and secondary sector. Forecasting was not an exact science and had to use birth data and housing data which was not always 100% accurate in terms of the numbers of children a 1 or 2 bedroom flat would “generate”. The Authority had been aware that there had been an influx of families moving into the borough and therefore had to act in order to provide extra capacity in school places for September 2013.

5 OFSTED Arrangements for the protection of children

- 5.1 In the September meeting, the Committee considered the OFSTED Report on the borough’s arrangements for the protection of children. Members expressed their concerns that the OFSTED inspection had rated the Authority as adequate and that not all the recommendations had been met. It was agreed that the improvement plan would be discussed at a special meeting.
- 5.2 The special meeting was held in November 2013 where the Committee were advised that all the actions had been included in the Service Plan which was now on the website under the Council’s Service Planning Process. Most actions had been fully or partially implemented and that only two remained incomplete. There were two actions which were still at the planning stage:
- Ensure the development of a workforce action plan in line with the transformation agenda and workforce strategy that can be monitored, reviewed and evaluated.
 - Feedback from children, young people, parents and carers are used to plan and improve service delivery. This includes implementing a system for the analysis of service user feedback in early help and preventative services.
- 5.5 The Committee requested that the action plan be amended to provide a progress report that was more visual and measurable. A RAG rating system was agreed and the Committee requested regular updates at each meeting. The Committee were advised that Havering was striving to improve on the adequate rating, and despite budgetary pressures and issues around workforce, the ambition of managers and members was to get the service to a consistently good standard.

6. Local Safeguarding Children’s Board

- 6.1 At the September meeting, the Committee were advised of the recent appointment of the new independent Chairman of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) and it was agreed to invite the Chairman to address the Committee.
- 6.2 The Committee met with the Chairman of the Local Children's Safeguarding Board (LCSB) at the meeting in January 2014.
- 6.4 The Havering LCSB like other London Boards is a member of the London wide London Safeguarding Children Board and agencies follow the London Safeguarding Children procedures. This includes ensuring that partner organisations had essential training in place, there was suitable emphasis on good recruitment and staff supervision, DBS checks were carried out and ensuring any allegations against those working with children are thoroughly investigated. The Board is also responsible for overseeing safe and effective child protection practice,
- 6.5 CSBs are now subject to Ofsted inspection and review. 6.6 .
- 6.7 The Committee reviewed the Local Safeguarding Children's Annual Report for 2012/2013 and noted the next LSCB Annual Report would be presented in June/July 2014.

7 Joint Topic Group – Children & Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee with Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 7.1 Following discussions with the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, it was agreed to establish a joint Children's Health Topic Group. It was noted that the Chairman and several Committee members from Children & Learning Overview and Scrutiny would attend future meetings.

8. School Transport

- 8.1 The Committee requested that the authority investigate into transport to and from Dycourts School following receipt of several complaints. The complaints stated that the transport would often arrive late at the school following journey times that could range from 75 minutes up to 2 hours. If this was correct, it would have a significant effect on pupil behaviour as well as reducing the time spent in lessons. It was noted there appeared to be similar difficulties in transport to and from Corbets Tey School.
- 8.2 At a later meeting, members of the Committee were advised that, following the complaints, there had been a review of the routes, cluster points and taxi journeys. It was, however, decided not to change the cluster points and to encourage parents to bring the children to the cluster points. The Authority concluded that providing an additional bus would not solve the problem but were looking at the introduction of additional forms of travel in time for January 2014. It was regretted that the number of children in wheelchairs was adding to travel time and complicating the journeys. Dycourts School had five to six coaches providing transport and there were no further funds to provide another.

8.3 Committee members expressed their disappointment that this was the second occasion the matter had been brought to the Committee and that children were still arriving late for school. The Committee also voiced concerns about users having difficulty in contacting colleagues in the Passenger Transport Team. The Committee requested a briefing on what further action would be taken to resolve the problem.

9. Mash Update

9.1 The Committee requested an update on the MASH operation following the OFSTED inspection. Progress had been made in addressing MASH timescales, reviewing the LSCB and its links to Overview and Scrutiny, the establishment of the Children's Society service for advocacy and for following up on Missing Children.

9.2 Following the visits made by members of the Corporate Parenting Panel to MASH, there had been a number of concerns about a backlog of cases that had not met with timescales. Members were assured that timescales and response times were now being met.

9.3 The Committee recognised MASH had only been in place for 6 months at the time of inspection and there had been issues around the new IT systems although overall the Inspectors were happy with the arrangements.

9.4 MASH would have a full complement of permanent staff following a recruitment drive. It was important to retain good permanent staff but the department also used temporary staff. The standard of newly qualified staff was high but they did not have the experience and therefore management oversight had to be in place. The Committee was advised that there was likely to be an overspend on staffing for the year so as to ensure that statutory responsibilities were carried out.

10 Special Education Needs and changes arising from the Children and Family Bill 2013

10.1 The Committee were informed that the Statement of Educational Needs will be replaced by a new plan for every child who has special needs up to the age of 25 years if they remain in education. This had arisen out of the government Green Paper – Support and Aspiration published in March 2011 and would become law in February/March 2014 for implementation in September 2014. The aim was to create a more family friendly SEND process which draws together support across education, health and care (EHC).

10.2 A SEND Project team with representatives from education, children's, adults and parents health services had been set up with working groups to cover all major changes. In addition there would be a Parents/Carers Forum and an advocacy group gathering the views of children and young people.

10.3 There were four major areas of change and development:

The Local Offer

- Requirement to publish a local offer of services for children with SEND on its website
- To show parents how services can be accessed and include health, education, social care, schools and the voluntary sector.
- Over 50 parents have been consulted about how the offer should look and how they would wish to access it
- Working groups producing content
- Model site now up and running
- Discussion about how to incorporate into other Council websites.
- Local Authorities will have to introduce a system of mediation

10.4 Education Health and Care Plans from 0-25

- Local Authorities must ensure the integration of services for education, health and social care for children and young people with SEND up to the age of 25
- Single assessment procedure (involving parents and children) so that families do not have to repeat their story a number of times
- Work has begun with a view to creating a simpler system with a single point of access if possible
- A pilot programme will start with the very youngest children in December

10.5 Joint Commissioning

- Clause 26 of the Draft Bill says there must be joint commissioning arrangements between education, health and social care
- Must ensure that there are resources are provided to assess children and then provide for their needs.
- Formal mechanism for resolving complaints and difficulties between the agencies.
Discussions have begun with colleagues in the CCG and a working group has been set up

10.6 Personal Budgets

- Clause 26 of the Draft Bill says there must be joint commissioning arrangements between education, health and social care
- Must ensure that there are resources are provided to assess children and then provide for their needs.
- Formal mechanism for resolving complaints and difficulties between the agencies.

10.7 Eventually over the next two to three years, all children would have had their statements changed to EHC plans following consultation with their parents. The Committee were advised that Havering was well placed to achieve timescales however it was noted that there was a need to take care around commissioning future health services. With regards to education, an EHC plan would name a school or education provider with the appropriate facilities. If there were to be a disagreement between parties, the mediation service would then be asked to resolve the issue. No additional government funding had been made available for the scheme.

The Committee noted the report and requested a further update on the new scheme at the end of 2014.

11 Teenagers Sexual Health and Substance Abuse Report 2010/2011

11.1 The Committee were presented with the report collated by the Children's Trust with data provided by the Office of National Statistics.

11.2 Teenagers Sexual Health

The Committee learnt that it was an absolute priority of the council to reduce teenage pregnancy in Havering. It was, however, disappointing that the borough continued to experience a relatively higher rate of under 16 conceptions although overall there had been a steady reduction in the rate since 2010. . .

11.3 Officers reassured the Committee that all options were discussed and every support given to teenage mothers whether they chose to terminate or proceed with the pregnancy.

11.4 Members expressed concern about a survey finding that one in six young people stated that they knew of someone who had been sexually exploited. Members were advised that there were processes in all schools where young people could safely report about themselves or others being exploited. In addition, the police were also involved in discussion. The authority was planning a survey on the matter for 2014 in addition to an LSCB sub group who were carrying out work on the subject. The Committee requested sight of their findings on completion. .

11.5 Substance Misuse

The Committee was advised that the second part of the report provided an insight into how services are performing as well as identifying trends/patterns so that services could be reprioritised if necessary. The local findings were based on an on line survey. 324 people between the ages of 16 years and 17 years took part.

The report was summarised as follows:

- Across England in 2012, the prevalence of illegal drug use was at its lowest since 2001 and alcohol use also continues a downward trend since 2001.
- In Havering, the majority of teenagers who responded to the survey have never tried a drug. In contrast, the majority of teenagers have tried alcohol and half had tried smoking.
- .
- 60% of the respondents had been offered a drug in the last 12 months.
- 40% teenagers had reported trying drugs. Cannabis, ecstasy, legal highs and cocaine were the preferred drugs.
- .

- The number of young people referred into the local (Young Addiction) service remains stable at just over 125 in 2012-13.
- In 2012-13, the overwhelming majority of young people were seeking support for their cannabis and alcohol misuse.
- Almost half of young people referred into the service in 2012-13 were aged 15-16 and lived in Harold Hill, Rainham and Romford.
- Clients receiving early interventions in 2012-13 were more likely to report being drug free whilst specialist clients were more likely to report reduced use.
- 100% of professionals surveyed reported that they would recommend the service to other professionals and parents/carers.

11.6 The Committee were advised that there had been a decrease in young people using drugs and alcohol in Havering. The number of young people referred to services for drug or alcohol abuse had remained stable at 125 for 2012/13. These services were free of charge and young people were referred by schools or other agencies.

12. Children and Young Peoples Services Complaints Report 2012/2013

12.1 The Committee received the report on service complaints handled by Children and Young People's Services during the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013. In addition, it also showed the compliments received.

12.2 Complaints about Children and Young People's Services were reported separately because they were handled under specific regulations that individually defined the statutory process into 3 formal stages (Stage 1, 2 and 3). Havering introduced an informal Pre Stage 1 process in 2005 to support a better complaints practice and avoid complaints escalating to statutory processes.

12.3 Some of the key messages within the report during 2012/13 were:

- The overall number of complaints were around 180 and within this figure 46 matters were raised by MP's and Councillors.
- The overall number of Stage 1 complaints had decreased slightly.
- The number of Stage 1 complaints, that escalated to a Stage 2 complaints had increased in 2012/13 by 1.
- There was one Stage 3 complaint for the financial year 2012/13 This Stage 3 complaint would roll over into 2013/14.
- For 2012/13, 43 Compliments were received, these were in relation to the good work Children and Young People's Services have carried out.
- 5 complaints were submitted to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).
- The outcomes from these complaints were: 2 referred back as a premature complaint and investigated locally as a statutory Stage 1 complaint. 1 outside LGO jurisdiction, 1 informal enquiry, and 1 complaint was investigated by the LGO with local settlement.
- Most complaints were initiated by parents rather than children and young people and the majority related to the quality of service, alleged behaviour of staff or disputed decision.

13. Review of Complaints Annual Report – Children and Learning

- 13.1 The Committee was asked to note that the report excluded Pupil Services - School Admissions and Exclusions Appeals, which are a statutory requirement and are dealt with by Committee Administration within Legal & Democratic Services.
- 13.2 In 2012/13 there were 8 complaints, compared to the previous year 2011/12 where the number was 20. The reasons for the complaints related to quality of service, challenge of Council decision, dispute decision, Council being unreasonable and policy issue. The number of enquiries received from MPs and Councillors amounted to 50, 17 of which related to school appeals decisions.
- 14. Review of attendance data for Schools/Academies for the school years 2009-2010 to 2012/2013 and attendance support in Havering**
- 14.1 The Committee received a report setting out the attendance data for schools and academies. It was noted that the information was from 2009/10 to 2012/13 (autumn and spring term only). There was a national issue in getting attendance figures which were up to date.
- 14.2 The Committee were advised that it was the parents' responsibility to ensure that their children of compulsory school age received efficient full-time education. This could be by regular attendance at school, alternative provision or by education elsewhere.
- 14.3 Local Authorities were responsible for identifying children missing education (CME) and ensuring they are not at risk of becoming CME. Schools also monitor pupil's attendance through their daily register, and inform the Local Authority of the details of pupils who are regularly absent from school or have missed 10 school days or more without permission. All irregular attendance of pupils is referred to the Local Authority to investigate as part of their safeguarding duties.
- 14.4 The report set out the rates of attendance and the persistent absence rates of primary, secondary and special schools in Havering compared with England, Inner London, Outer London and our statistical neighbours. It was noted that there were robust approaches taken with parents and policies for schools. Head teachers had expectations for attendance and there was a policy of no term-time absence. The absence at secondary schools overall was not a big issue, and the academies were buying into the attendance monitoring to ensure continuity throughout the education system.
- 14.5 The Committee was informed that special schools had good attendance, as pupils were, in the main, collected and supported practically in attending school. There were however health issues that could impact upon attendance figures in special schools.

14.6 Officers were working on detailed analysis and breakdowns of equalities to find out which was the most vulnerable group to experience lower levels of attendance. The results of this analysis would be reported to the Committee.

15. Council's Continuous Improvement Model

15.1 The Committee agreed to review the 2013 report on Commissioning School Places at the appropriate time in the New Year.

16. Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report

The Committee approved the Annual Report for the Corporate Parenting Panel 2013/2014.

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

SUMMARY

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The Corporate Parenting Panel is a sub-committee of the Children and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee and is constituted from the elected members of the Committee. The role of the Panel is to monitor services and care provided to Looked After Children in the care of the authority.

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REPORT DETAILS

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1. Viewpoint Feedback – Looked After Children

- 1.1 The Panel received the first Viewpoint report for the period November 2012 to May 2013 summarising the views of 27 children of various ages currently living in foster/residential care in Havering.
- 1.2 Viewpoint is an on-line secure system consisting of a series of questionnaires that children and young people complete either with the help of a responsible adult or alone. Viewpoint enables young people to share personal views in a way that they may not always feel comfortable doing face-to-face. Although the response had not been huge, the age of respondents ranged from 5 years to 16 plus years.
- 1.3 It was noted at the time that Viewpoint was disproportionately used by children placed with in-house foster carers (16/27) and who have a full care order (15/27). Children who cannot read or who have difficulty in reading would be assisted by their mentor/befriender to complete the survey. It was acknowledged that more needed to be done to support children with less established permanency arrangements and those in other types of placement to use Viewpoint as well as developing an accessible version of Viewpoint for children with disabilities.
- 1.4 A number of key issues were identified from the survey:
 - Children who used Viewpoint liked it and found it easy to use
 - The most common issue was that children wanted to review their contact arrangements with their family. The location of the review and their familiarity with other attendees was also important to them. Most children wanted to have their review held in school.
 - Children using Viewpoint had high levels of aspiration for themselves. The majority of children felt they were getting the right help with their education (16/20) and they were happy in school, although this decreased for secondary school-age children.

- Most children liked living with their carers, knew why they are living there and were clear about how long they would stay. Older children were less likely to feel able to talk to their carer or about things that were important to them and were less likely to feel very safe in the placement.
 - Younger children had high levels of self-reported well-being; this tapered off for older children who were more likely to report feeling sad on a regular basis.
 - Almost all children who responded generally felt safe.
- 1.5 The Panel heard that the on-line survey was building and it was hoped more children would participate in the future. The collation of data would be referred to the Children in Care Council which in turn would prove helpful in directing future services. Any child who had difficulties completing the questionnaire at home or at school would be able to discuss this with the Social Worker and help would be offered.
- 1.6 The Panel were advised that the questions were designed with reference to local indicators as set by the Department for Education, the Good Childhood Index developed by the Children's Society, draft NICE Quality Standards as well as feedback from children and young people. The installation costs were £13,000 and the system had been used in Australia and Canada.
- 1.7 A further report covering the period the period October to December 2013 was received at the January 2014 meeting. The report was positive overall although the response rate was disappointing. The key messages from children were as follows:
- Viewpoint was used by children for 19% of reviews over Oct-Dec 13 (completed returns = 25). Children using Viewpoint were most likely to complete the age 5-8, age 9-11 or age 12-15 survey.
 - Children most often used Viewpoint by themselves, without support from an adult.
 - Children using Viewpoint overwhelmingly want to attend their reviews, and want to either talk for themselves, or have someone talk on their behalf. Generally they want reviews to be held at school or in their placement, and would like refreshments to help the review be more enjoyable.
 - Children using Viewpoint generally are happy at school, think they are getting the right help and feel safe at school. Their carers help them with schoolwork when they need it. They have high aspirations for themselves; with careers in teaching, policing and football the most frequently cited ambitions.
 - Most children using Viewpoint think they get the right amount of help from adults, although of the 23 children who answered the question 'does your social worker visit you as often as you need, five said 'not really' or 'not at all'. Children generally say their social workers listen to them and that their social worker helps them in a number of different ways.
 - Of the children that have used Viewpoint so far this year, 58% said they have had a change of social worker over the last term¹, although when asked how they felt about this, the most popular answer was 'happy'.

- Children using Viewpoint generally report that they feel safe, both in their local area and in their placement. Overall they are happy in their placements.

1.8 The Panel was concerned about a small number of children who stated that their Social Worker did not visit them as well as the small number who felt that they were not receiving the right sort of help at school. It was explained to the Panel that there was a shortage of social workers and difficulties in recruitment.

1.9 It was noted that the Viewpoint year-end report would incorporate additional datasets regarding children's participation in their assessments and plans. This would include quarterly contract monitoring information on the advocacy service, including the number of referrals received, number of new cases and the number of cases closed, and data on how children are contributing to their reviews, including the proportion of children attending in person and the proportion of children in care who have been supported by a children's society advocate at a review.

2. Total Respect Training

2.1 During July and August 2013, several members of the Panel attended the Total Respect training event. The training provided a thorough understanding of children's rights and included the following topics:

Exploration of assumptions about children and young people

Listening to young people

The experience of being a child in care

Involving young people within care planning

Young people's involvement in policy development and effective advocacy

3. Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub

3.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel agreed that MASH should be a regular agenda item throughout 2013/2014 and requested regular updates and MASH data from officers.

3.2 All Panel members visited the premises of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub during October 2013. Following the visit, a number of queries were raised by members including relationships with other agencies, the backlog of cases and problems with the IT system. The Panel were advised that the backlog had been caused by delays in classification and inputting reports onto the police system. All children who came to the attention or contact with the police were given a RAG rating. Reassurance was given that children considered to be in danger were dealt with immediately. The IT system was new and was undergoing testing.

3.3 Members were advised that MASH was well resourced with regards to staffing levels. Officers advised that they were about to re-commission the Out of Hours Children's Service starting in April 2014. This would be run by the Emergency Duty Team which would cover after 5.00 pm in the evening until 9.00 am and also on weekends.

- 3.4 MASH were aware of foster care placements from other boroughs and that LAC children and children on a Child Protection Plan would be highlighted by officers to their counterparts in Havering, however, Assessments were not always easily available although information could always be obtained from the police. The movement of people into the borough posed further risks of importing problem families or problems with gangs into the area. Panel members were reassured that there were good communications between boroughs.
- 3.5 The Panel received an update on a recent internal audit that had been carried out by Children's Services over the last two to three weeks. A total of 20 cases, some live and some past, were subject to scrutiny and the findings were as follows:-
- Most referrals were MASH appropriate
 - Appropriate decision making by key Managers in cases to be forwarded onto other agencies/social workers
 - The appropriate RAG ratings had been applied to cases, Red for 4 hours, Amber for 1 day and Green for 3 days
 - An issue around obtaining consent in referrals, (not Child Protection) had been highlighted and was being addressed
 - All cases were properly recorded onto the system
 - There were several cases where delays occurred owing to partners – ie GP/School and the issue has been raised with the Local Safeguarding Children's Board.
 - Appropriate decision making and clear instruction from managers
 - Referrals were of good quality
 - Communications with Police were very good
- 3.6 Panel Members were advised that communications with NELFT had improved. There was currently no case backlog. All child protection cases were picked up immediately and assessed straight away.
- 3.7 Staff vacancies were in the process of being filled and there was now managerial stability. It was important to put staff training and workforce development programmes into place.
- 3.8 Overall, officers were reassured that operations were running smoothly and that a formal Audit Report would be made available at a later date.

4. LAC Manager and LAC Nurse

- 4.1 The Panel received a report from the LAC Associate Director and LAC Specialist Nurse. The Associate Director for Safeguarding and LAC had management responsibility for 6 named Nurses and their teams and the Specialist LAC Nurses were members of these teams. Each local authority had a dedicated Band 7 Specialist Nurse for LAC. Most of the work done for LAC was statutory and lead by the Local Authority within their role as a corporate parent.

- 4.2 The LAC Nurses had agreed a foster carer training package and this would be delivered to groups of foster carers going forward. The LAC Nurses were also finalising the standardisation of LAC training across the Trust. The training would be delivered to all universal practitioners as initial or update training to support the provision of a bespoke service to Looked After Children and Young People.
- 4.3 The NCB Policy Briefing published in January 2013 looked at how the reformed health system would meet the needs of Looked After children and young people after April 2013. The policy specified that Looked After Children had:
- An initial Health Assessment within 28 days provided by a GP or Paediatrician.
 - Children under 5 would receive a health review 6 monthly. This was provided by the Health Visitor in all boroughs.
 - Children over 5 would receive a health review 12 monthly. This was provided by the School Nurse in all boroughs.
- 4.4 The key issues which would impact on the ability to deliver within the agreed timeframes included a delay in notification to health that the child or young person was now looked after and failure to provide the health team with the required documentation. In addition, the issue of Looked after Children and Young People out of area increased the likelihood of delay in receiving their health assessments.
- 4.5 The LAC Team advised that Sex Health Advisors would speak to a Looked After young person if pregnant and encourage them to access available services, and if necessary, accompany them to hospital. They would also be available to advise on options anytime and anywhere. The LAC Nurse and School Nurse (who was trained to deal with LAC Children) would also play a supportive role. It was noted that there was currently 1 LAC pregnant in Havering at the current time.
- 4.6 With regards to contraception, the Panel were advised that the LAC Nurse would ensure when completing the assessment, that they were Frazer Guideline specific to Sexual Health i.e. that the young person would make the decision; that the young person was safe; that the partner was named.

5. Case Studies

- 5.1 The Panel were presented with two example Pathway Plans, one good and one bad, for young people in care. It was noted that Pathway Plans were intended to support young people from 16 years until their 18th birthday. The example of the good pathway plan was where there was a summary of the assessment of the young person's needs and abilities. Arrangements to complete the needs assessment required for the pathway plan and a timetable for this assessment would be discussed and agreed at the young person's statutory review meeting prior to their sixteenth birthday. Young people would be actively involved in the assessment process, and additional assistance to fully involve them would be offered if required. Assessments would take account of any needs that resulted from the young person's ethnicity, language, religion, culture, sexuality or any disability or impairment.

Unless there were exceptional reasons not to do so, other individuals/organisations would also be consulted including:

- The young person's parents, and/or others with parental responsibility.
- Other family members who are important to the young person.
- Anyone caring for the young person – relatives, their foster carer or staff in residential homes.
- The young person's school or college.
- Any provider of health care or treatment for the young person.
- Any independent visitor, mentor or Connexions personal advisor offering support to the young person.

5.2 The Pathway Plan would also take account of any existing Assessments and plans relating to the young person such as Assessment and Progress records, Care Plans, Personal Health and Education Plans and Placement Information Records. A copy of the plan would be given to all young people as part of the assessment and planning process.

The Panel noted the example of the bad pathway plan which had no forward planning for the subject on leaving care.

The Panel were advised that there was no dedicated team to support young people leaving care at the present time. Plans were underway to recruit an officer who wanted to work with adolescents.

5.3 The Committee questioned whether Care Plans and Pathway Plans were regularly checked or subject to an audit. The Panel were informed that an audit had commenced two weeks ago and it was agreed that the results of the audit would be made available to the Panel. The Panel were assured that Care Plans that are presented to Court are signed off by the Service Manager of Children's Services and that all Care Plans and Pathway Plans were reviewed regularly.

6. Visit to Heather Court

6.1 Several members of the Panel visited Heather Court – an accommodation unit for young people leaving care.

7. Sufficiency Statement & Looked After Children Statistics 2012

7.1 The Panel were presented with the Sufficiency Statement and the LAC Statistics for 2012. The sufficiency duty required Local Authorities to improve outcomes for Looked After Children in order that secure sufficient accommodation would be found to meet the needs of the children.

7.2 It was noted that Havering performs less well in comparison to other Local Authorities in Looked After Children stability measures. Following a recent restructuring, however, some improvements had been made and whilst the figures themselves were within acceptable parameters, improvements would continue in this area.

7.3 Panel members enquired about the current level of Social Worker recruitment and were advised that 85% were agency staff. Officers explained that this was a national problem and that Social Worker vacancies were difficult to fill.

Newly qualified Social Workers would go straight to work for the agencies. There was currently a Recruitment and Retention paper with Human Resources which officers would be reviewing. It was noted that the over 12's team were well staffed.

7.4 Foster Carers

The paper noted that Foster Carers needed more support and assistance, particularly at the outset if fostering a difficult child. Actions currently being progressed included the improvement of training and Foster Carer skills as well as having more freedom to operate. There were plans for a new Head of Fostering and Adoption who would be looking at more co-operation and linking services with Redbridge and Barking & Dagenham who had good fostering services.

7.5 In relation to Young Peoples Accommodation, an emergency placement unit situated at Lombard Court was in the process of development. This facility would be for 16/17 year olds who are not yet ready for independence but cannot live in a family environment. Heather Court was another facility but would only take fully assessed teenagers and not emergency placements.

7.6 At a later meeting, the LAC statistics for 2013 were made available. The panel noted the draft LAC Benchmarking report which compared data with other participating authorities. The report indicated that Havering's performance was much in line with other boroughs.

7.7 Officers advised that there were some concerns regarding settled communities in the borough and that it was difficult to find appropriate foster carers from these groups. In cases where there were language difficulties, the service would seek carers through the private sector.

7.8 The panel were advised that a new Adoption Manager was in place and was looking at fostering recruitment for teenagers and sibling groups.

7.9 Concern was expressed over the cost of residential care which in Havering stood at £847.00 per week for each child. Officers confirmed that out of the total 196 Looked After Children, 10 were in residential care. In some cases, they were disabled children who needed 24 hour care and others were young people who are difficult to look after.

8. **Court Case Project Update**

8.1 The Panel received an update on the project which aims to reduce delay and improve decision making for children subject to care proceedings, in particular, those who had been abused or neglected. Delayed decisions owing to mismatched time frames between the courts, the local authority and the needs of the child meant that children could experience longer exposure to abuse and neglect, disruption of attachments with temporary carers, unstable placements at home or in care and prolonged uncertainty about their future.

8.2 The Family Justice Review (2011) identified systemic issues that were causing unnecessary delays in care proceedings. The system had become

more reliant on external expert witnesses rather than social workers' own recommendations. The Munro Report recommended that social workers be re-focused as the expert in the child's life.

8.3 The Panel were advised that delays were primarily being caused by inadequate pre-proceedings work, organising family group conferences and not identifying possible carers among the extended family. In the courts, delays were caused by waiting for expert reports and independent assessments as well as immigration and language issues.

8.4 The Children and Families Bill 2013 introduced a 26 week limit for completing all care and supervision proceedings. Applications to extend would be considered if purposeful to the child. It was noted that the following benefits would be:

Children spend less time in interim care;
Decision making is focussed on children's developmental timescales;
Clear planning helps avoid prolonged uncertainty for children in interim care, and permanency decisions within their timescales;
The focus on decision making in proceedings emphasises the need for early help during the pre-proceedings phase;
Focuses social workers as the experts in the child's life; opportunity for professional development

8.5 Havering was part of the "East London Court Work Project", working with Barking and Dagenham, Newham, Redbridge and Waltham Forest to resolve issues that caused delays in proceedings. Havering was also working with CAFCASS, the courts, and service providers to reduce delays. Standard document templates had been developed and used across the five boroughs. There was also a Working Group looking at how external assessments are commissioned. The project commenced on 1 July 2013 across the 5 boroughs.

8.6 The Committee were advised that at the time, there were four on-going cases awaiting legal proceedings in Havering.

9. Local Authority Provision For Young People On Remand in Custodial Establishments

9.1 The Panel were advised that any young person remanded by the Criminal Court was a Looked After Child automatically and became the responsibility of the Local Authority. They would be sent to either a Young Offenders Institution or a Special Training Centre. There were currently two in Havering – one was on remand for a murder and the other was for an acid attack. The former had served one year on remand and was waiting for the case to be heard at Snaresbrook Crown Court, the latter was awaiting psychiatric assessment. One of the accused had moved into the borough in January from Hackney and there was currently an on-going discussion with counterparts in Hackney as regards costs, however, once sentenced the offender would no longer be the responsibility of the local authority and the Ministry of Justice would be responsible for costs.

- 9.2 The Panel were advised that when offenders leave prison, they go home and are no longer considered a LAC but may come back into care as sometimes parents reject them. The Panel were also informed that children had to be moved out of Havering - sometimes with their families because of gangs and drugs.

10. Placement Stability Study

- 10.1 The panel noted the Placement Stability data for Looked After Children covering the period April to October 2013. The key points were as follows:

Placement Stability 1

Percentage of Looked After Children with 3 or more placements during the year.

During April to October 2013, 12 LAC (6.1%) had more than 3 or more placements in comparison to 20 (10.6%) for the same period. The national average was 11%.

Placement Stability 2

Percentage of Looked After Children aged under 16 who had been looked after continuously for 2.5 years and living in the same placement for at least 2 years.

From April to October 2013 69.8% of eligible LAC aged under 16 years had been in the same placement for at least 2 years and that performance was in line with the 70% target for 2013/2014. The national average was 68%.

Placement Stability 3

Percentage of Looked After Children placed outside local authority boundary and more than 20 miles.

- 10.2 Performance was currently below the target for 2013/2014 of 15% (lower is better). Officers advised that the rise in numbers for August was due to young people transferring from education to independent living.
- 10.3 Officers advised that in some cases they are not always aware as children may exhibit different behaviours following placement. In addition, difficult children will sometimes have problems settling with carers or vice versa.
- 10.4 Officers reiterated that it was not in their interests to place a child with a carer where it is not going to work and that the aim is always to be honest with prospective carers. The quality of the fostering team had improved and that this process was continuing. The placement statistics showed that placement breakdowns were occurring less and that in cases where problems had arisen, carers were seeking help at an earlier stage. Officers acknowledged that Social Workers needed to be aware of any difficulties early on in the process and to ensure that these were dealt with.

12. LAC Training For Carers

- 12.1 The panel noted the list of courses available to prospective foster carers. Officers advised that several courses were compulsory however carers could attend more courses and receive increased payments.

13. Virtual Head

- 13.1 Officers advised that the Virtual Head had left and that Penny Patterson from Learning and Achievement was covering the role for both Junior and Secondary sectors. It was also proposed that a LAC Co-ordinator be appointed to oversee all administrative matters. A plan was being formulated and this would be presented to Corporate Parenting Panel.

14. Local Safeguarding Children's Board

- 14.1 During the period under review, the Panel received and noted the minutes from the Local Safeguarding Children's Board meetings.