



Havering
LONDON BOROUGH

CHILDREN & LEARNING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Subject Heading:

Corporate Parenting
Panel Annual Report
2010/2011

CMT Lead:

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Policy context:

Under the Council's Constitution, each Overview and Scrutiny Committee is required to submit an annual report of its activities to full Council. As a Sub-Committee of the Children & Learning Overview & Scrutiny Committee, practice has been for the Corporate Parenting Panel's Annual Report to also be referred.

SUMMARY

This report is the annual report of the Panel, summarising the Panel'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

1. That the Committee note the 2010/2011 Annual Report and authorise the Chairman to agree the final version.
2. That the Committee agree that an abridged version of the report be included in the Committee's own annual report and referred to Council.

REPORT DETAILS

- 1.1 Since the Panel's previous Annual Report, there had been both a Local and General Election, which had in turn led to changes in the membership of its parent body, the Children & Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee, including a new Chairman. This has resulted in new membership of the Panel and consequently its early work was concerned with building an understanding of the Panel's role and responsibilities as well as the wider care system.
- 1.2 The Corporate Parenting Panel met 4 times throughout the Municipal year, and made two visits, firstly to the Leaving Care Club to talk to those who had left or who were about to leave care and secondly to the Children in Care Council. Some members of the Panel also made visits on the Panel's behalf to the accommodation of a number of children in care to scrutinise the standard of provision. The Panel's visit resulted in some of the young people being re-housed in more suitable accommodation, as well as a review of the service provided by some of the Council's contractors. A member of the Panel also made a visit to a Corporate Parenting Conference and highlighted a number of important matters for the Panel's consideration.
- 1.2 At its meeting in September 2011, the Panel met with officers from Social Care to consider and be advised and the roles and responsibilities of the Panel, noting that all councils, and particularly all elected members, carried responsibility for ensuring good outcomes for children looked after by their authority. They [members] were required to consider whether the standard of care provided would be good enough for their own children and, if not, to take steps to improve it. The Panel was informed that their role applied to all children defined legally as "looked after", which was a legal term created by the Children's Act 1989 to describe all children in the care of the local authority. The Panel also considered the various reasons why children were taken into care as well as the various legal sub-categories by which a child was in care.
- 1.3 At its meeting in November 2011, the Panel met with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Havering Foster Carers' Association to discuss their work and the quality of foster care in the borough, as well as satisfaction amongst the foster

carers. Members were keen to establish the difficulties and challenges faced by social workers. The foster carers responded by talking of arranging normal necessities such as doctors appointments and school day trips could be difficult. This was particularly the case when the parent of the child was still the legal guardian. Where the LA had care of the child then this process was easier. Carers would often place children under their own doctor, for ease and for emergencies approval was not required. Members were informed that pocket money for children would come out of the Carers Allowance. Child Benefit money would stop once the child was placed in care, though the parent would receive the payment for six weeks after the child had been placed. Most children in care were eligible for the Education Maintenance Allowance (this has since been abolished and replaced by a £180 million bursary scheme).

- 1.4 In January 2011, the Panel attended a visit to a group of care leavers, who formed a voluntary group comprised of young people who have left or who are about to leave care. The group would meet every so often at the Council's Midland House. Members discussed with the young people their concerns and the positive things about the care system in Havering, as well as their individual aspirations and how the Council could help them to achieve it. There was also some discussion of the accommodation provided for the young people leaving care in independent living, whether in shared accommodation or supported lodgings; many experiences of the accommodation was negative. Many stated that the hostels provided were of better quality; there was a consensus that the shared lodgings were not up to standard, and examples included broken windows, broken locks, blocked toilets, broken front and rear doors; as well as the accommodation being situated in areas with high-levels of crime and deprivation. In one case the young person lived in a flat that was so small that it could only fit a double bed. The debate was wide-ranging and whilst many expressed an extremely negative view of the care services; it was also clear that each young person's experience of the care system was unique. There was some extreme polarisation in terms of the general view of the care system which seemed to vary significantly depending upon age. Typically, the older amongst them seemed to have a more positive attitude to the care service than the younger
- 1.5 At its meeting in March 2011, the Panel met with a representative from the Council's Housing Department to discuss the allocation of houses to young people, particularly in light of issues arising from the members' visit to the Leaving Care Club. The Private Sector Leasing (PSL) Scheme had been operating for over six years and had built up a portfolio of 820 good quality properties to meet ongoing demand from groups in high housing need such as Young People Leaving Care. Under the scheme, properties were leased from private landlords across the borough for a period of three to five years and then let to the new tenants on a non-secure council tenancy. The Council managed the properties and the tenants were required to comply with conditions of their tenancy which were broadly the same as tenancies for council-owned accommodation. The Panel noted that in March 2010, a Service Level Agreement was made between the Housing Service and the Leaving Care Team that the PSL Scheme would accommodate all Young People Leaving Care, with certain exceptions. The Panel was informed that so far, the PSL Scheme had accommodated 22 Young People Leaving Care and

there was currently a further 13 clients that had been referred to the scheme and were awaiting accommodation.

- 1.6 Also at its March meeting, the Panel met with Havering's Virtual Head Teacher to consider his annual report for the last year. The role of the Virtual Head Teacher was described as providing support to schools and social workers to narrow the attainment gap between LAC and their peers, which was typically pronounced. Designated Teachers also oversaw the Personal Education Plan for every LAC in their respective schools. Personal Education Plans were documents which highlighted the primary needs for each LAC in terms of their education and learning. The PEP commenced at foundation state (age 5) and ran through to GCSE. The PEP needed to track attainment and was added to every 20 days. The Virtual Head Teacher oversaw each PEP. The process for reviewing the PEPs was underway, though only 50 of the 160 PEPs had been received. The Panel noted the various achievements and areas targeted for improvement.
- 1.7 Towards the end of March 2011, the Panel attended a meeting, by invitation, to Havering's Children in Care Council where members participated in a discussion with young people about the Panel's role and responded to a series of questions and requests made by the young people.
- 1.8 Throughout the year, the Panel received statistical data on children in care. The information provided included information on the number of children in care; and the patterns of fluctuating numbers, the ethnicity, care status and age-ranges of the children in care. The purpose of the data was to allow members to judge how effectively the service was providing for the looked after children in the borough.

Background Papers

None.

The following comments have been submitted by members of staff:

Financial implications and risks:

There are no financial implications or risks arising directly from this report.

Human Resources implications and risks:

There are no human resources implications or risks arising directly from this report.

Legal implications and risks:

There are no legal implications or risks arising directly from this report.

Equalities and Social Inclusion Implications and Risks:

There are no equalities or social inclusion implications or risks arising directly from this report.