

## **EDUCATION, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel held on Monday, 25 February 2013 at 7.00 pm in ground floor meeting room 5, Civic Offices, Portsmouth.

(NB These minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting.)

### **Present**

Councillors Darron Phillips (In the Chair)  
Will Purvis  
Ken Ferrett  
Lynne Stagg  
Alistair Thompson

### **Also Present**

Stephen Kitchman, Head of Children's Social Care & Safeguarding  
Kate Freeman, Looked After Children's Service Commissioning Manager  
Sarah Newman, Commissioning Manager, Assessment Services  
Teresa Deasy, Democratic Services

#### **8 Declaration of Members' Interests (AI 1)**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **9 Apologies for Absence (AI 2)**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Matthew Winnington, Michael Robson, Charter Academy governor representative and Helen Reeder, Teachers' Liaison Panel representative.

#### **10 Minutes of the Meeting held on 28 January 2013 (AI 3)**

**RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education, Children & Young People's Scrutiny Panel held on 28 January 2013 be confirmed as a correct record.**

#### **11 Portsmouth City Contact Provision Protocol and Practice Guidance (AI 4)**

Sarah Newman referred to the protocol which was previously circulated.

(TAKE IN PROTOCOL)

It was explained that there are two elements to the protocol: (1) court proceedings, (2) permanent long term care. The protocol is about assisting staff in the understanding of the principles of contact. Under the Children's Act (1989) Schedule 2 the local authority has a duty to promote contact with

parents or a person who has parental responsibility or a person with whom the child has a connection. There is a difficulty in situations where the child has a dangerous or risky family background. In such circumstances, the safety of the child is paramount.

In circumstances where it is considered that limited contact with family representatives is required, contact must be facilitated by the local authority in a supportive environment. In some circumstances contact might be so risky that social care staff must be with the child and the parent.

The principles for local authorities to follow regarding contact have been established. The setting of a timescale is very important, as is the need to allow the child to settle in to a new environment before contact is arranged. For example, if a child is placed some distance away from the residence of the parent it is important to maintain continuity in that the individual who takes the child to the contact point must be the same person every time. It is recommended that children in care are not placed more than 20 miles away from their parent, unless there are reasons to the contrary. The importance of regularity and a routine is also stressed. The purpose of assessment is to ensure that the right level of contact is arranged for individual children and the one size fits all principle is not recommended.

In deciding upon the level of contact, social workers have to complete a risk assessment. In situations where the child is considered to be at high risk all contact visits are supervised. Where the risk is judged to be at a medium level, it is recommended that the visit take place in a group environment with support from a social worker and in low risk situations the parent and the child may be permitted to organise a time and a venue in a safe place within the community, for example a children's playground.

At the Battenburg Avenue centre there are facilities for contact arrangements between children and their parents in situations where the case is going through the courts. About 50 cases are currently in court proceedings and the level of contact ranges between once a week and five times a week.

Provision for contact arrangements for children who are in long term care is provided at the Roberts Centre. However, the service is looking to centralise provision at the Battenburg Centre.

It was explained that contact is very important for children but in response to the question as to what to do if a child does not want contact, it was explained that it is up to the courts to direct contact. However, independent social workers may present the child's point of view in situations where the child does not wish to have contact with the parent. The courts are very much in favour of retaining contact between parents and children in care. In these situations, social workers would make every effort to obtain the views of all concerned, then go back to the court and build a case for the child that is in their best interests. In other situations, it might be appropriate to arrange for a dialogue between the child and their parents in order to resolve the situation. Contact does not have to be face to face.

During regular looked after children reviews, the child is asked how they feel about contact with their parents. Sometimes social workers have to intervene by discussing the matter with the child and explaining why it might be advisable for them to seek contact with their parent. Generally, social workers maintain good relationships with children in care. Kate Freeman pointed out that the degree of contact depends on the age of the child and their individual requirements. For example, if they have a good relationship with their foster carer, the foster carer may be involved in resolving questions relating to contact.

Referring to page 12 of the protocol, members asked about the section relating to the views and needs of the parent and how it was possible to obtain information about the parents' individual circumstances, for example, any addictions etc, if the parent does not talk about these issues. It was explained that very often this information is obtained from the child or from health visitors and GPs. There is a good information transfer. Staff are also very skilled at interpreting what is going on with the child and their family and what happens next depends on individual assessments. It was also pointed out that social workers recognise that sometimes they need to listen to children and sometimes older children are able to make their own arrangements.

In response to a question from the panel Sarah Newman explained that the looked after children service maintains good relationships with Surestart centres and had given their input on the Surestart centres consultation. A member of the Early Years team sits on the placement panel.

Members commented that if the service is operating out of fewer centres access issues might arise. They were advised that as Portsmouth is a small city, it was unlikely that any parent or child would have to travel very far. Members also suggested that the ideal situation would be for all children's centres to have the same facilities.

Members asked for some statistics on the number of contacts per week, the consistency of supervision, and any other useful statistical information.

The Isle of Wight, Hampshire County Council and Southampton City Council are working with Portsmouth on a four borough protocol. The courts have a copy of Portsmouth City Council's protocol and are complimentary about it. There is a considerable amount of cross-boundary contact.

At this point, at 7.40 pm, Sarah Newman left the meeting.

## **12 Portsmouth Barnardos Miss U and U Turn Service Report April – Sept 2012 (AI 4)**

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Members referred to the second paragraph under the heading "Multi-Agency Working" with reference to young people being taken to Portsdown Hill for the purpose of sexual exploitation. They asked whether the police were dealing with this matter by placing a greater police presence on Portsdown Hill. Kate Freeman commented that this was an example of the influence of multi-agency working. Each of those young people at risk of sexual exploitation would have a risk plan. Councillor Stagg suggested that as she was on the police panel she could raise this matter.

Members also referred to training sessions which were delivered to a total of 45 GPs in Portsmouth, Southampton and Hampshire. They commented that this was not a very high number given the likely number of GPs in this area. They stressed the need to reach more GPs and perhaps there should be some sort of incentive to them for attending these training courses.

Members commented on the need for national comparators and the need to find out whether looked after children obtained any added value as a result of education etc which they would not have received if they had not been taken into care. They also mentioned the need to look at threats to services from budgets and how they would be managed.

## **13 Date of Next Meeting**

It was decided that the next meeting should be an informal meeting and would be held at 8.00 pm on Monday 11 March in the Cabinet Room.

The meeting concluded at 8.00 pm.

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