

HOUSING & SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY PANEL

MINUTES of the meeting of the Housing & Social Care Scrutiny Panel held on Friday, 27 February 2015 at 9.30 am in The Executive Meeting Room - Third Floor, The Guildhall.

Present

Councillor Darren Sanders (in the Chair)
Councillors Alicia Denny
Hannah Hockaday

11. Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

Councillor Sandra Stockdale sent her apologies.

12. Declaration of Members' Interests (AI 2)

No interests were declared.

13. Minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2015 (AI 3)

The minutes of the previous meeting were not available for approval.

14. Support services for young people aged 16-25 living in isolation (AI 4)

Jane Smith, Operations Director, representing All Saints Young Persons hostel asked the panel to note the following points:

- The Society of St James, based in Hampshire provides substance misuse and mental health services, a care home for older people with an alcohol dependency as well as supported accommodation for 15 to 25 year olds, the All Saints Hostel.
- There are currently 22 tenants in the hostel; most are between 15 and 17 years old.
- The looked after children are funded separately.
- There are clusters of four bedrooms with a shared kitchen, where the young people cook for themselves.
- Many young people have experienced chaos in their family life or substance misuse.
- Benefits are only paid if the young people are in employment, education or training. It is often difficult for them to commit to something and to continue because of their background. They might not have had any ambition instilled in them or had any boundaries set.
- The dynamic of the group has an impact on how it functions.
- The rent is set by First Wessex at £170 per week and is for the room only. If the young person is working their Housing Benefit is reduced and they are liable for most or in some cases all of their rent. It can be difficult for young people to see the value of working if their unemployed peers are doing nothing but having their rent paid.

- 24 hours support staff cover is funded by Supporting People. The landlord provides day reception from 9am - 4pm and night cover for housing management issues from 10pm - 6am.
- A life skills education programme is provided, which includes advice on budgeting, nutrition and drugs.

In response to questions from the panel, she added the following points:

- The young people are expected to stay for a maximum of six months and then move onto the Foyer or other supported lodgings, where they receive progressively less support, so at the end they are independent. However, some people return two or three times.
- Most young people grow out of their challenging behaviour.
- The use of legal highs is a serious problem for our tenants. It can make people seriously ill, cause long-term mental health issues and be a gateway for taking other drugs. First Wessex works with the hostel staff regarding tenants' behaviour but as it does not ban the use of legal highs, often the cause of the unacceptable behaviour, which includes abuse and damage to property is not addressed.
- There is no significant problem with alcohol abuse.
- Many tenants have undiagnosed mental health issues. Although these are often identified by hostel staff, it can be difficult for access to the appropriate services to be arranged in the six months that they live at the hostel. It is even more difficult if there are other issues with substance misuse involved because there are very few dual diagnosis services.
- One 17 year old was evicted from the family home and the hostel was asked to 'teach her some rules and boundaries.'
- Finding move-on accommodation can be difficult as landlords are often reluctant to rent out their properties to young people, particularly those who have been homeless in the past.
- Young people are referred from the Housing Panel which meets fortnightly.
- Individual plans tailored to suit the individual are essential.
- The service's KPIs are set for the number of the young people in substance misuse services, employment, education or training and how many improve their life skills.
- It might be better to bring in specialists to teach Personal, Social and Health Education classes rather than teachers.
- It is hard for young people to take responsibility for themselves at such a young age.
- For rent arrears and unacceptable behaviour, three warnings are given and 28 days' notice to quit. If the tenant's behaviour improves, these can be rescinded.
- There has been discussion regarding the possibility of purchasing a shared house for tenants who do not feel able to live with a large number of people.
- Rates of self-harm by teenagers are significantly high.

Sarah Read, Positive Activities and Participation Manager explained that:

- It is often a shock to young people that at 18, support is not automatically provided. They have to use their own resources to pull themselves together; some cannot do this.
- She was involved in the setting up of All Saints.
- More affordable rents are required to assist young people.
- Responsibility for youth centres moved to the housing service.
- Many people use the youth clubs, which are often located in areas of deprivation. These can be a valuable refuge from home.
- Many children are evicted from the family home at 16 years old.
- Legal high use can cause mental health problems, particular for teenagers whose brains are still developing.
- Some shops sell legal highs to children; often 'on tick.'
- Motiv8 provides youth clubs for 12 to 21 year olds. Most regulars are between 12 and 14. In some areas, where there has been a club for many years, generations of families attend.
- Detached workers talk to groups of young people who choose not to attend the youth clubs to discuss any issues they might have.
- The Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) agenda has recently been invigorated.
- Meals used to be provided at All Saints and the cost deducted from the tenants' allowances. Although this was good in that ensured that the young people were well fed, it meant that they had no experience of budgeting.
- Therapeutic intervention models have been successful e.g. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy with street drinkers.
- There are many parenting courses available but people are only referred to these once a social worker is involved with the family.
- Many agencies are shutting or changing their remit.
- Children and Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is oversubscribed.
- Portsmouth has higher levels of low self-esteem in young girls than the rest of the country.
- The city also has a high level of 14 year olds who take overdoses.

Action.

A visit to All Saints Hostel be arranged for the panel.

15. Date of next meeting (AI 5)

The next meeting will be held on 20 March.

The meeting concluded at 11.45 am.

Chair of the Housing and Social Care Scrutiny Panel