

HOUSING & SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY PANEL

MINUTES of the meeting of the Housing & Social Care Scrutiny Panel held on Friday, 6 February 2015 at 9.30 am in Conference room A, floor 2 of the Civic Offices, Portsmouth.

Present

Councillor Darren Sanders (Chair)
Alicia Denny
Hannah Hockaday
Phil Smith
Sandra Stockdale

Also present

Maria Cole, Residents' Participation Representative

6. Apologies for absence (AI 1)

There were no apologies received.

7. Declarations of Members' Interest (AI 2)

There were no declarations.

8. Minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2015 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Housing and Social Care Scrutiny Panel held on 16 January 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the chair.

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

The chair welcomed both guests to the meeting and introductions were made around the table before evidence was given.

- a) The panel heard from Elaine Bastable, the Housing Options Manager.
Elaine explained that family breakdown is the biggest issue. This could be relationship issues often around teenage behaviour but it could also be property related such as overcrowding. The welfare benefit system and how it works for young people can also have an effect. The housing benefit rules state that young people under the age of 35 can only go into shared accommodation, a bed-sit or a single room. Rent is often required in advance which is a barrier. Young people are often evicted from hostels because they do not adhere to the requirements of residency, i.e. going into training so therefore the job seekers allowance stops and they then get into arrears. It is about trying to motivate young people to keep them in accommodation and help them to prepare for future life. Drug use in our hostels is also an issue. Portsmouth does have a high level of accommodation for young people compared to other areas. There are approximately 90 bed spaces for under25s, mainly accommodating those

in the 16-21 year old bracket. The council does try to encourage these young people to follow a pathway, hostel accommodation>training>addressing identified support needs>leading to more suitable long term housing solutions. When placements are failing, a panel of experts will look at every possible alternative to prevent evicting a young person. Unfortunately we cannot prevent every single eviction.

Elaine explained that overcrowding in accommodation is a big issue in the city. The council does not have enough three-four bedroom properties. Peoples' expectations are also a battle. The council has a large amount of stock which is under occupied. Some families do not want to move from social housing into privately rented accommodation/areas despite the fact that this would immediately alleviate overcrowding issues and/or relationship issues. Social housing offers more security. In the private sector rents could be higher, properties often have a garden and are bigger but they are not offered long term lets. Landlords, understandably, are not keen to offer anything other than a six-month term tenancy initially to a new tenant, due to possible risks. Although most private sector landlords are looking for long term tenants, tenants are naturally concerned about the lack of known security. There is an affordability issue too, with private rents being higher than social rents, although the new affordable rents are not much lower than the private sector rents. Higher rents increase the risk of living in poverty.

Elaine continued to explain that it is often the case that a teenager is 'just being' a teenager but that the parents cannot tolerate that kind of behaviour. The parents do not know how to deal with the young person so relationships break down in the family unit. We have had cases where the family have actually upped and left the young person in the property. The troubled families services can support families with parenting issues but both the parents and the young person need to engage with the support offered for the situation to be able to improve. If there is a lack of engagement, it doesn't work. If we could keep families together and support them through the growing up years we could save money in the long term.

b) Mark Rodwell, the manager of the Young Persons Support Team

Mark informed the panel that there is usually a history attached to the family. There will have been involvement with various agencies over a period of time. As mentioned by Elaine it is usually the case that the behaviour of the young person is not being managed. That behaviour tends to get worse once the young person leaves the family, particularly if they are placed in a hostel with other young people with behavioural issues. It is quite often down to the parenting, not setting boundaries and not dealing with the situation. Sometimes there may be mental health problems with family members, domestic abuse or substance misuse.

Mark continued to explain that there is often a lot of multi-agency support available. Community wardens and the Youth Offending Team as well as other agencies can be involved. The families tend to be known to services throughout their life. However it is often the case that services will stop when the family reach a certain level but sometimes a consistent low level

of support is needed rather than a short term, higher level of support. This is difficult to manage when services are working with budgetary constraints and certain criteria/procedures. We do try to pull on services at the earliest stage but it is often about changing the mind set of both families and the young people.

When young people come from being 'looked after' whether it be a family or foster care, they do struggle living alone. The council does have a high support unit in Victoria Road South and other housing pathways for young people. However, some young people do struggle with their tenancy. Some may have been evicted from The Foyer or All Saints and trying to find private sector housing for these young people is really difficult and often a guarantor is needed to secure a tenancy. An incredible amount of time is spent trying to help these troubled young people but there does reach a point where there has to be consequences for their actions/behaviour. Some behaviour is dangerous not only to themselves but others. The service does try to support them and find them accommodation, and to work with them in small steps. Many young people have a number of needs including mental health issues, domestic abuse in the family, parents could have mental health problems, some drug use or just low aspirations/motivation. Most young people do want to be back with the family. There is a feeling of isolation not being part of the family. We do support the young person on a pathway, based on assessment and planning.

10. Date of next meeting (AI 5)

RESOLVED that the next meeting of the panel be held on Friday 27th February 2015 at 9.30am and the panel would continue to hear from witnesses as listed on the scoping document.

The meeting concluded at 10.55 am.

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Chair of the Housing and Social Care Scrutiny Panel