

EDUCATION, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel held on Monday 19 November 2012 at 7.00 pm in the Executive Meeting Room in the Guildhall, Portsmouth.

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

Present

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

Also Present

Kate Freeman, Looked After Children Service
Commissioning Manager
Stephen Kitchman, Head of Children's Social Care &
Safeguarding
Elaine Bastable, Housing Options Manager
Dawn Saunders, Associate Director, Public Health Trust
Matt Small, Key Stage 3/4 Looked After Children
Education Adviser
Teresa Deasy, Local Democracy Officer

58 Declaration of Members' Interests (AI 1)

There were no declarations of interest.

59 Apologies for Absence (AI 2)

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Helen Reeder, Teachers' Liaison Panel.

60 Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 October 2012 (AI 3)

(TAKE IN MINUTES)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel held on 29 October 2012 be confirmed as a correct record.

61 Developing Virtual School Arrangements (AI 4)

Matt Small gave a presentation on the virtual school arrangements. Copies of the slides for the presentation are attached to the minutes.

(TAKE IN PRESENTATION)

Matt explained that regarding progress from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2, the Portsmouth average for looked after children was not significantly different from the national average. However, the data was provisional at the moment and would be finalised in January. Progress was slightly better regarding Portsmouth pupils attending schools outside the city but, as the cohort size was very small, this could not be regarded as significant.

The Education for Looked After Children Steering Group is chaired by Kate Freeman.

A GCSE reward scheme was being proposed and the steering group was looking at how to award pupils for progress made.

The question was asked about the personal education plans for young people and how engaged they would be. Matt Small explained that the service was trying to achieve a consistency in how involved young people are and their contribution to PEPs. There was a need to do more to engage young people and carers. At team meetings training was given to social workers in relation to the personal education plan.

Panel members requested an anonymised version of a pupil's education plan for their information and officers agreed to supply this to the panel..

Details of the virtual school arrangements had been distributed to headteachers and an advert for a part time Virtual Executive Head . However, as no response had been received, the arrangements were then circulated to deputy heads. If there was no response to this circulation, it was proposed to advertise the arrangements more widely.

In response to questions from the panel, the following points were clarified.

Regarding the key stage 4 attainment levels and the gap between Portsmouth looked after children's achievements and the national average, Matt explained that there was a need to improve the tracking and monitoring of progress. There were also issues around sharing data with other local authorities. He explained that most young people require individual solutions to their problems. Fourteen people had been commissioned to provide one to one tuition for some pupils.

Kate Freeman commented that stability of placement was very important in relation to a pupil's attainment levels. If a young person was not emotionally stable it was unlikely that they would be able to play a full part in school life and would not therefore be in a position to learn.

It was explained that when children come into care they were assessed via sophisticated analysis systems in relation to their predicted performance.

Members asked whether “damaged” children coming into care were measured according to their progress. The comment was made that such children may not be able to achieve the same standard as those from stable families. Kate Freeman explained that award ceremonies for looked after children were arranged and even small achievements were recognised.

Questioned about the possibility of a link between educational attainment and the age at which children come into care, Matt Small explained that as yet no detailed analysis had been undertaken. . It was an interesting area and he was looking at attainment for mid to late teenagers entering care.

Returning to the subject of awards, members questioned whether there were subject specific awards for GCSE subjects. Officers explained that this was not the case but there was a bonus for attainment at maths and English. Officers added that very often carers would award children in their care for achievements in educational qualifications.

Members brought up the matter of post-16 education; as they believed that teachers were not encouraging pupils enough to go on to further education. Matt explained that the targeted youth support services provide support in this area. . Kate Freeman added that all young people have a pathway plan to help them to decide and plan effectively for post-16 training/employment or education.

Members asked about the relationship with schools and whether the city council could do anything to improve relationships especially with those schools outside the Portsmouth City Council boundary. Matt explained that he dealt with some 60 separate schools. Some of these schools maintained very good relationships with the service but others could be improved. tThis was the case both inside and outside the city. The virtual school would be a key factor in challenging schools. This proposal had the full backing of the city council in addition to senior management.

Members mentioned the use of technology in capturing data. They were particularly concerned about capturing data from other local authorities. Matt Small explained that the service was looking into this area, as it was very much in focus. He commented that it was all about being creative with the resources available and if something wasn’t working there was a need to look at doing things another way.

Members asked about help for foster parents with regard to education. Matt explained that training was delivered to foster parents to assist them in encouraging the education of children in their care and the aim was to create a supportive culture between the carer and the school.

At this point, 7.50 pm, Matt Small left the meeting.

62 Improving Choice and Availability of Accommodation for Care Leavers and Opportunities for Training/Employment (AI 4)

Elaine Bastable explained that the Housing Options Service deals with social housing and affordable housing. Social housing is owned by Portsmouth City Council and registered social landlords. The role of Housing Options is to allocate a quota of properties for care leavers. Currently, ten properties are

available and they are all in use. Young care leavers availing of Housing Options properties need to be assessed as able to survive and have sufficient life skills to live in social housing. Therefore, the Housing Options Service relies on the social care service to refer young people appropriately.

Elaine went on to explain that supported housing was also available i for care leavers. There are currently 70 to 80 units available for supported housing. In the past, there had been some problems with young care leavers being evicted, going into temporary accommodation and then back to supported housing hostel. However, Housing Options had worked to overcome these issues and they were becoming less common.

In reply to questions from the panel, Elaine explained that support workers were available to support care leavers and their housing needs were assessed with a support plan being introduced. Trained support workers would be available at evenings and weekends to help the young people and to challenge their behaviour if necessary.

Support was available also to help young people to manage budgets, deal with relationships, cook for themselves, safety issues, hygiene matters and health and safety.

Elaine referred to the risks that may result from benefit changes and explained that the social landlord provider of housing for young care leavers was First Wessex Housing; this organisation would be working to ensure that young people would be getting the benefit to which they were entitled. The Department for Work and Pensions had also picked up a number of people who were not receiving the appropriate benefits and were challenging supported accommodation providers. However, the latest circular states that payments direct to supported housing providers would be changing. Therefore, young care leavers may be at risk as many of them do not have the skills to arrange to pay rent themselves.

In response to members' questions, Kate Freeman explained that the Looked After Children Service provides life skills training to young people. Kate mentioned that not all care leavers have bank accounts. Currently, they were looking at assisting young people to open savings accounts. Elaine Bastable added that the young persons support team members sit on the supported housing team meetings and therefore there was a good relationship between the two services.

Regarding advice on cooking and shopping, Elaine explained that these skills were part of the budgeting skills taught to young people. Elaine went on to explain that the cluster flats were being remodelled to provide young people with their own kitchen to enable them to become independent and to learn the necessary skills for maintaining an independent lifestyle. Previously, accommodation was with meals provided. Kate Freeman added that two training flats had been made available to enable young people who needed life skills training to avail of the opportunity of a 4-6 week training course.

In response to members' enquiries about working with charitable organisations to provide training, for example in cookery classes, Stephen Kitchman explained that there was a partnership called Boost with the Roberts Centre which provided life skills training for young people. Kate Freeman added that the need to look at other providers who would be able to give complementary support had been identified. Members mentioned the probation service and it was explained that support from the probation services was only available if a young person was on licence.

Elaine Bastable mentioned that there was very little opportunity for young people looking for accommodation in the private sector to obtain one room accommodation. Care leavers are entitled to claim for a one bedroom property up to the age of 22 but there was a lack of this type of accommodation and landlords were not keen on taking on care leavers due to difficulties in obtaining deposits and references.

Elaine Bastable left the meeting at this point at 8.10 pm.

63 The Health of Looked After Children (AI 4)

Dawn Saunders explained that looked after children had the same health risks as other children, but to a greater extent due to their background. It was hard to obtain data on the health of looked after children in the Solent area. The health of looked after children was generally better than the Portsmouth average but the health of Portsmouth children was lower than the national average. Older children were less likely to engage with health services. However, all looked after children had access to NHS services. These services were commissioned from Solent NHS Trust. There was a looked after children's doctor and looked after children's nurses. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is commissioned to support children and young people and have a key role in supporting foster placements.

Within the health team, physicians, nurses and other professionals are working together to improve the health of looked after children. However, with the current financial cutbacks, they were struggling, as in all branches of the national health service. Currently, there was not much administrative support available which affected the organisation's data processing capacity. This was compounded by the fact that Solent NHS Trust was currently getting ready for foundation trust status. However, the overspend at Queen Alexandra Hospital was not affecting this team.

There were issues around consent gathering and it was recommended that Solent Healthcare should work with the social care team to improve on this area.

Dawn referred to the report entitled "The Health of Looked After Children in Portsmouth", which was circulated with the agenda. She highlighted the recommendations set out on page 3.

(TKE IN REPORT)

Members referred to recommendation 1.11 of the report recommending that a

health needs assessment be carried out to look in detail at the physical and mental health needs of looked after children and asked whether a health assessment was carried out when children enter care. Dawn replied that this was the case; however, there were difficulties in obtaining discrete data in the NHS.

Members commented on cuts in resources and the disparity between referrals in Portsmouth and elsewhere and why there was no national standard. Members asked whether there were problems in interrogating data which was not particular to the Solent team and if there was something the city council could do to make representations to improve the capturing and interpreting of data. **Dawn Saunders agreed to find out more about the levels of funding cuts and their effect of the health of looked after children and report back to the panel.** Dawn explained that there were issues for CAMHS in relation to children who were fostered outside Portsmouth. It was difficult to obtain information about them, especially if they lived a significant distance away from Portsmouth. Kate Freeman explained that the situation was better in Portsmouth than in some other areas, as Portsmouth Social Care funds a dedicated service from CAMHS for Looked after children. A CAMHS review is being undertaken to ensure that evidence based services are being provided and agreed outcomes being achieved.

Dawn went on to emphasise that data sharing was the biggest issue, especially data sharing between health and social care. However, there was a significant amount of work ongoing to overcome these issues. There was also the issue of confidentiality and the need to obtain consent up to 100%.

Members queried reference to Appendix 4 in paragraph 8.2 of the report and Dawn explained that this should be amended to read Appendix 6 and agreed to amend the report accordingly.

At this point Kate Freeman left the meeting at 8.35 pm.

Members discussed the importance of inviting somebody from Solent Health Care to attend the next meeting and also asked whether it would be possible to invite representations from a charity that deals with young care leavers. Stephen Kitchman advised that the charities called No Limits and Barnardo's would be appropriate charities. There was also a person at Highbury College who was experienced in working with looked after children and members asked that this person be invited to attend the next meeting to discuss the issues that looked after children have in the post-16 learning environment.

It was requested that the Targeted Youth Support Services provide a presentation on post-16 education for looked after children. It was also mentioned that it would be appropriate to invite representations from the police, probation and the youth offending team to give some input to this review. Stephen Kitchman reminded panel members that it had been agreed at a previous meeting that representations from the children in care council should be invited to the 17th December meeting and this was agreed. Members suggested that it might be possible to hold the next meeting at an alternative venue if this would be more appropriate and less intimidating for young people and the possibility of starting the meeting at 6.00 pm was suggested if it would be more appropriate.

Stephen Kitchman added that information on support for staff and training for those dealing with looked after children would be provided for the next meeting.

64 Dates of Future Meetings (AI 5)

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on Monday, 17 December 2012 at 7:00pm.

It was agreed that the first meeting of 2013 be held on Monday, 28 January at 7:00pm.

The meeting concluded at 8.50 pm.

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