

EDUCATION, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY PANEL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Education, Children & Young People's Scrutiny Panel held on Monday 17 December 2012 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)
Ken Ferrett
Will Purvis
Lynne Stagg
Matthew Winnington

Also Present

Stephen Kitchman, Head of Children's Social Care & Safeguarding
Mark Rodwell, Targeted Youth Support Manager, Integrated Youth Support Service
Adam Murphy, Participation Officer, Corporate Parenting Team

Two representatives of the Children in Care Council
Teresa Deasy, Local Democracy Officer

65 Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 1)

There were no declarations of interest.

66 Apologies for Absence (AI 2)

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Alistair Thompson, Michael Robson, Charter Academy Governor representative, Helen Reeder, Teachers' Liaison Panel, Kate Freeman, Looked After Children's Service Commissioning Manager. Helen Brennan, Head of Student Support Services at Highbury College.

67 The Children in Care Council (AI 3)

Adam Murphy explained that Children in Care Councils were set up on the 21 June 2008 as a result of a Government White Paper which gave responsibility to local authorities to set up Children in Care Councils. The Strategic Director for the Cabinet Member for Children & Education established the Children in Care Council in Portsmouth. The Council meets every school holidays. They also run activity groups during the school holidays.

Currently the Children in Care Council in Portsmouth is going through a transition period. They have developed a pledge, with Portsmouth City Council (as advised in the Government White Paper). The pledge would involve 6 promises. The promises were:-

- 1) We promise to support you when you come into care
- 2) .We promise to do everything we can to keep you safe and happy while living in care
- 3) We promise to support your relationship with family and friends as much as we can
- 4) We promise to help you enjoy and achieve in your education
- 5) We promise to help you prepare for adult life
- 6) We promise to help you succeed in your dreams

The numbers involved in the group have changed over time as young people dip in and out as they come into and leave care. The distribution list is about 20 but about 10 attend meetings regularly. The youngest contributor is aged 12 and the oldest is 20. The group is looking at focussing on the 16-21 year age group.

They organise junior Children in Care Council's activities for the 6-12 year age group during the school holidays and a high number of young people take part in these activities including, surprisingly, a number of those who are in care outside of the city.

Members expressed a concern about the representation of children aged 13-16 years. Adam explained that it was not intentional that this age group was not represented, it is just that young people of that age are generally rebellious. However, as young people get older they think differently and want to engage with Social Care staff and other organisations and groups. He commented that the inclusion of this age group would present too much of a diversification of interests and make the Children in Care Council difficult to operate. The 13-16 age group generally favoured more structured activities with instantaneous useful effects and an incentive to attend.

Members then heard evidence from two members of the Children in Care Council: 19 year old Sarah* and 16 year old Simon*. Both representatives agreed that it was useful to be on the Children in Care Council, as they could share and learn things from other children. It was a good way of obtaining views of other people and helping each other. Sarah said that she had joined at the suggestion of her social worker in order to get to know other young people so that they could help each other. She mentioned that she had been in care since she was aged eight. Sarah explained that when she was younger she had wished that she wasn't in care. Now she felt that her foster carers during her time in care had been good and she was still in contact with some of them. She had had more social workers than foster carers but this had not presented a problem.

* Names have been changed to protect the identity of the individuals

Simon stated that he had been in care for five to six years and had been well supported during that time although he had had three different foster carers. He had got on well with all of them. He had recently moved to a new family only two weeks ago and he was the only foster child in the family.

Simon commented that he had contact with his father twice during the last year. He did not believe it was up to the Social Care Service to improve contact arrangements and stated that he believed it was up to the parents to organise it.

Regarding education, Sarah commented that she believed that her education achievements were much improved as a result of being in foster care because she had received encouragement from her foster carers. Whereas if she had not been in care she believed that she would not have had encouragement and help to enable her to get the most from education opportunities. She added that she had achieved her GCSEs and was currently doing A-Levels with a view to going to university.

Simon commented that he had taken his GCSEs and was currently at college. When he first came into care he had anger issues at school. However, he had received help and things were much better now. He was studying Social Care in college.

When asked about education and if there was anything the City Council could do to improve education for children in care, both representatives agreed that it would be useful for some young people to have one to one tuition.

Members asked whether the young people felt they had been treated differently as a result of being in care. Sarah explained that she had not told anyone at school, only her friends and therefore she believed that being in care had made no difference. Whereas Simon stated that at school they had known that he was in care and the teachers had helped him significantly.

The young people commented that as they got older they realised what people had done for them and what might have happened if they had not been taken into care.

Councillor Purvis mentioned that members would be very interested if the Children in Care Council wanted to discuss anything with this Panel or with any other group of members of the City Council and not just about matters relating to looked after children. Adam Murphy explained that two children in care representatives attend meetings with Councillor Woods and Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson when these various issues can be brought up. They were also represented on the Portsmouth Council of Students.

When asked if there was anything that the City Council could do to improve services for children in care and it was agreed that this would be put to the Children in Care Council at their next meeting. Adam and the two representatives commented that they believed that there should be more foster carers. They also pointed out that it would be very useful to have social workers based on the ground floor of the Civic Offices for ease of access.

ACTION

Adam Murphy to put an item on the agenda for the next Children in Care Council Meeting and to feedback to the January meeting of this Panel.

At this point, at 8:00pm, Adam Murphy and the two Children in Care Council representatives left the meeting.

68 Post 16 Education for Looked After Children (AI 4)

Mark Rodwell explained that Helen Brennan of Highbury College had unfortunately not been able to attend tonight's meeting due to illness. However, she had produced a hand-out on the support provided by Highbury College. The hand-out was circulated to members.

(TAKE IN HANDOUT)

Mark Rodwell explained that the Integrated Targeted Youth Support Service combines the former resources of the Targeted Youth Support Service, Preventing Young Offenders Project and some of the commissioned work to Motiv8. The purpose of this new team was to intervene early to prevent cases escalating in to tier 4 social care services and to support young people aged 9-19 who are at risk of a number of poor outcomes. With regards to Looked after children the service has maintained a small team of specialist careers guidance advisers who will support Looked After Children with Employment, Education and Training opportunities. Universal careers guidance is now the responsibility of schools and colleges. The service also uses year 11 school data to ensure support is given to young people who are at risk of being Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET).

Mark commented on the benefits of partnership working with Social Care teams and the Youth Offending team now that all services were physically in the same building

A duty social worker specialising in working with young people was based at the Go For It Centre which provides advice for young people, who are Looked After or a care leaver.

Recently, funding had become available from the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH) for a pre-apprenticeship scheme to allow the City Council to provide funding for young people to find work especially work leading to apprenticeship and this would be particularly useful for looked after children. This scheme had been already in operation in the Isle of Wight. The Isle of Wight model was showing that it was an excellent scheme for moving young people on to apprenticeships. It also provides very good routes to work and training for those who have not obtained 5 GCSE passes.

Mark went on to give some figures stating that 71% of looked after children were in employment or education or training, whereas 28% were not. He added that once young people reach the age of 21 it is difficult to maintain contact with them to find out what they are doing. He commented that once young people get a place in college they tend to do well. The problem was often the ongoing support and encouragement required to help young people make the correct informed choice to go to college or further education. Good relationships with the local colleges and training providers had been established. The Service provided good support to prevent young people from dropping out of college by early intervention. Data sharing with schools and colleges is taking place and will lead to effective information sharing. These arrangements with the new service will make it easier to target support to looked after children at a much earlier stage.

In response to a question from members, regarding what could be done to decrease the number of young people who are not in employment, education or training Mark explained that the aligning of the Youth support Teams with one another will help reduce Looked after Children who are NEET, as partnership working with Social workers is now easier and steps have already been put in place to ensure careers guidance and support is offered at pathway plans, those already NEET and any Looked after child/care leaver being closed to the Youth Offending Team.

Members commented that it was likely that the length of time a young person was in care might indicate a correlation in their educational achievement and employment prospects. 11 year olds taken into care may never really catch up educationally; whereas those taken into care at an earlier often do better.

Mark mentioned the Troubled Families Programme, a multi-systematic therapy, adding that the City Council have received a grant to deliver this service in Portsmouth. They had looked at issues in education, exclusions and linked into the Child & Adult Mental Health Service.

In response to questions from the Panel, Mark commented that the Service is working very closely with the Job Centre Plus and information sharing is taking place. However, sometimes there were issues with data sharing which would have to be overcome. Working with young people with disabilities, he commented that they work with young people up to the age of 25. However, they were limited in what they could offer. The advisers in the Education Team are responsible for managing the moving-on plan for young people with disabilities.

With regard to young people post 18/19, there is a limited service but they sign-post these young people to Adult Social Services and will advocate upon their behalf if required. Regarding contacts with possible employers, this is dealt with by Denise Vines' team.

In response to a question about apprenticeships, Mark commented on the lack of traditional engineering apprenticeship places available nowadays. However, there were plenty of other apprenticeship opportunities within a much wider career range. In reply to a question from members, Mark explained that it was not necessarily harder for looked after children to obtain apprenticeships and he added that the Service would give them plenty of support. Regarding children leaving care and going to university, it was explained that discretionary awards were available to pay for looked after children to attend university up to the age of 21. These awards would pay for accommodation and tuition. There were also bursaries available.

At this point at 8.30 pm Mark Rodwell left the meeting. Members then discussed support for looked after children becoming involved in extra-curricular activities. They agreed to recommend training support for parents tutoring their children at home.

Another question raised was – how well do we manage to support looked after children who become involved in the Criminal Justice System and information on percentages was requested. Members wondered whether it was the fault of the education system or the fact that children are looked after that leads them into getting into crime.

Members also requested more information about adoption outcomes and adoptive parents and the transition from fostering to adoption. They requested more information for the next meeting.

The meeting concluded at 9 pm.

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