

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

RECORD OF DECISIONS of the meeting of the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education held on Thursday, 20 July 2023 at 5.00 pm at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Suzy Horton (in the Chair)

Councillors Chris Dike
George Fielding

12. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ryan Brent.

In order to accommodate other commitments, it was agreed to consider agenda item 7 (Local Authority Maintained School Balances at 31 March 2023) first, but for ease of reference the minutes will be kept in the original order.

13. Declarations of Members' Interests

Councillor Horton declared a non-prejudicial interest in that she is Vice-Chair of Governors at Craneswater Junior School.

14. Inspection of Portsmouth City Council Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)

Sarah Daly, Director, Children's Services and Education, introduced the report. Portsmouth was one of only 15 local authorities who had been judged Outstanding for the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection. Officers were aware improvement was required for the experiences of care experienced 18 to 25 year olds. Ofsted were likely to return within in the next two years and to focus on this particular area of work.

Members congratulated officers on the overall outcome judgement of Good and for identifying areas where additional work was needed. It was clear Children's Services were moving in the right direction.

Councillor Horton noted the estimated cost of losing an Ofsted Good judgement was about £9m; values and relationships were lost as well as money. With Ofsted inspections the council did not want to be told something it did not already know. Everyone was a corporate parent and could do much together to improve services for children. The council was pleased but not complacent.

15. Six monthly Adoption Agency Activity Report March 2022 - September 2022

Sam Bushby, Deputy Director, Children and Families, introduced the report on behalf of the Service Leader and outlined the Adoption Agency's successes. Portsmouth's Adoption Service had ensured there were no delays in forming relationships because of the Somerset Judgement when children were waiting

to be adopted. Although it was harder to place older children (usually over the age of four), sibling groups and those from a minority ethnic background, when they were placed the outcomes were better than with long-term fostering. Ms Bushby confirmed that adoption numbers in the second half of the year would reflect the effectiveness of Foster to Adopt arrangements; nine adoption orders had gone through the courts very quickly and officers were now satisfied they had moved beyond the Somerset Judgement.

In response to a question about the processes to recruit more adopters, Ms Daly said the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) had a whole recruitment strategy, including attracting people from all sorts of backgrounds who might have thought they were ineligible to adopt. The RAA were leading on approaching different parts of the community and networks to help find adopters for older children and sibling groups. The RAA's campaign was successful as it had found local adopters which meant the local authority did not have to buy adopters at a cost of approximately £35,000 each.

16. The Mockingbird Project

Jackie Clark, Service Leader, introduced the report and outlined the Mockingbird model, noting that Portsmouth had been called "the pioneers of the south coast." The positive feedback from foster carers was a recruitment draw for new carers. Mockingbird always sought to recruit within a 20-mile radius so children could maintain relationships with their families and schools. It could be hard for children in foster care to form friendships but the Home Hubs have enabled them to socialise. Fostering could be hard and experienced carers said the Mockingbird model helped them even when they considered giving up.

Members thought the model was "absolutely fascinating" and showed what could be achieved in a short period of time. The report was about championing good practice as a good news story. In response to questions, officers said there were 227 foster family households with 48 within Mockingbird. The number of foster households has been fairly consistent in Portsmouth over the last five years. It has been up to 230 but was usually 200 and never below 200. Later in the year officers would present on a review foster carers' allowances.

17. Private Fostering Annual Report 2022-2023

Aimee Dennis, Private Fostering Social Worker, introduced the report.

Councillor Horton said the report was a good piece of work highlighting the requirement to notify the local authority of private fostering arrangements.

18. Local Authority Maintained School Balances at 31 March 2023

Angela Mann, Finance Manager, introduced the report and explained its purpose was to check schools were managing their balances and to offer support where necessary. Since the report had been written, a response had been received from St Jude's C of E Primary School and officers were looking at how to support them. Mike Stoneman, Deputy Director, Education, noted the financial vulnerability of small infant schools in the current economic

climate, citing the support that the council has recently provided to both Manor Infant School and Southsea Infant School.

Councillor Horton thanked all those who had worked on the report.

The meeting concluded at 5.36 pm.

Councillor Suzy Horton
Chair