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**Title of meeting:** Children's Social Care Portfolio Decision Meeting

**Subject:** *Children's Lives in Portsmouth* - A response to the key issues highlighted by the Children's Society in the recent report

**Date of meeting:** Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> September

**Report by:** Sarah Newman, Deputy Director of Children's Services - Children's Social Care

**Wards affected:** All

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**1. Requested by:** Alison Jeffery, Director of Children's Services

**2. Purpose:** To update members with the work being done by services across the council following the publication of The Children's Society report *Children's Lives In Portsmouth*

### **3. Background**

3.1. **In May 2016**, the Children's Society published a series of reports about children's lives in different Local Authority areas. The report for Portsmouth, *Children's Lives In Portsmouth* outlined issues affecting children in Portsmouth who are at risk of abuse or neglect, and those living in the poorest families. The report distinguishes a number of groups of children - which I have dealt with separately below

#### **A. Children in Need/Adolescents in Need**

- The Children's Society report highlights that there are 43,360 children in Portsmouth, and 1436 categorised as children in need. At the end of May 2016, Children's Social Care was working with 1348 children. During 2015/16 Children's Social Care completed almost 1900 assessments to determine whether children needed support from Children's Social Care under the statutory framework for children in need as outlined by S17 Children Act 1989.
- The Children's Society report highlighted concern about the support available for 16 and 17 year olds in the city, citing that nationally over 90 per cent of 16 and 17 year olds remain in their parents care. In Children's Social Care we have worked with our foster carers and with colleagues from Housing Options to ensure that there is a range of accommodation available to children and young people who cannot live at home.

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- Between 01/04/2015 and 31/03/2016 49 young people presented to Children's Social Care for housing related issues. All these young people received an assessment to determine how best to support them.
- The Children's Society previously published a report *Getting The House In Order* outlining the challenges faced by homeless 16 and 17 year olds. This report makes recommendations to improve the safeguarding response to these young people. In particular, there is a recommendation that no child under 18 can be made intentionally homeless.
- In Portsmouth all children who present as homeless are jointly assessed by Children's Social Care and Housing and a joint protocol exists outlining who has responsibility for what so as to promote best practice. In addition to this there is a joint arrangement to oversee the commissioning arrangements of supported accommodation for vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds.

**B. Children who go missing from home or care**

- The Children's Society report highlights that every child who goes missing from home or care should be offered an independent return interview. Portsmouth City Council has recently reviewed the Missing, Exploited and Trafficked Strategy and strengthened the guidance for children who go missing from home or care. A risk assessment tool now exists along with clear pathways for support.
- Children's Social Care commission a service from Barnardo's (Miss U) to offer return interviews and provide support to these children. If a child is receiving support from Children's Social Care, the allocated social worker will complete this work, being independent from the care arrangement, and a reporting framework is being developed to ensure we are reaching the right children.

**C. Mental Health Services for children and young people**

- The Children's Society report highlights that in 2014/15 the average CCG spending on mental health for children was £2,721,000 whereas in Wessex for the same period it was £2,355,000. The recent report by the Health Select Committee that 'there are deeply ingrained problems with the commissioning and provision of children's and adolescent's mental health services' is cited.
- The Children's Society recommends that the LSCB has oversight of the access children have to mental health services and in Portsmouth the Safeguarding Board is scrutinising data provided by Public Health and the provider service.
- In Portsmouth there are transition processes in place for young people who go on to need services as vulnerable adults

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#### **D. Early Intervention**

- The Children's Society report highlights the decrease in general funding available for Early Help, and outlines that Portsmouth City Council has experienced a decline in financial support by 44.87 per cent between 2010-11 and 2015-16.
- This decline is mirrored in many other places in the country and chiefly reflects the significant reduction over that period in the funding allocation nationally for Children's Centres. Portsmouth has had tough decisions to make and there have been other reductions in early help services, too. We still maintain a number of in-house early help and public health services, however, plus contracts with the voluntary sector, such as Barnardo's and HomeStart.

#### **E. Immigration**

- The Children's Society report outlines that the numbers of unaccompanied asylum seekers looked after by Authorities across the county have increased.
- Between April 2015 and March 2016 Portsmouth City Council experienced a significant rise in the number of UASCs arriving through the port. For a significant period of time PCC were looking after between two and five new arrivals per year; but 2015/16 saw this increase to 32. The rise in UASC is expected to continue.
- To manage increasing demand Children's Social Care is developing expertise in managing these young people - assessing for trafficking factors, using interpreters, developing a two week induction to Portsmouth, developing arrangements with local schools and colleges and building a bank of carers motivated to care for these vulnerable children.
- Nationally the government have now established a voluntary dispersal scheme so as to distribute the demand for public services across local authorities. The scheme is based on an assumption that each LA should each accommodate a number of UASC at a rate of 0.07 of the child population. In Portsmouth this gives us a quota of 33 UASC. Should more children arrive into Portsmouth through the port, we will be working with colleagues from neighbouring authorities across the south east to manage their transfer.

#### **F. Child Poverty**

- The Children's Society estimate that 28.72 per cent of children in Portsmouth are living in poverty. They reference *The Debt Trap* report highlighting that a third of families in debt cut back on food, heating and

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clothing - and that these families are twice as likely to experience arguments and relationship stresses that have a negative impact on children.

- In Portsmouth, we no longer have a Council-run, application-based Local Welfare Assistance Scheme, however we have a number of schemes to assist families living in poverty. Services available include debt counselling, money advisors and a full range of social welfare advice commissioned by the Council from Advice Portsmouth, small energy grants during the colder months November to March, discount furniture/household goods stores and food banks. This information and support is available to 16 and 17 year olds. We also have a credit union offering affordable savings and loans schemes (loans are not available to under-18s).

#### 4. Recommendations

4.1. The Children's Society report makes a number of recommendations to improve outcomes for children in Portsmouth. The table below highlights the Children's Society recommendations, where PCC already has actions in place and where we may need to take action.

Area of concern	Recommendation	Actions in place	Actions to be considered/ developed
Children in Need	Local authorities should develop written policies that offer clarity on the nature and scope of their responsibilities in relation to legal aid for separated children	✓	
	Annually monitor the spending on local welfare provision to build up a profile of need in the area		✓
Adolescents in Need	Ask your Local safeguarding Board to audit the safeguarding response that agencies provide to 16 and 17 year olds and review thresholds for intervention to ensure they do not discriminate against or fail to assess 16 and 17 year olds	✓	
	Adopt an explicit policy that no child under 18 can be 'intentionally homeless'		✓
	Review the local homelessness protocol to ensure all children under 18 who present as homeless receive a joint assessment from Housing and Children's Services	✓	
	Local authorities - as commissioners of supported accommodation for vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds - should ensure all these settings have effective safeguarding policies in place and are regularly scrutinised by the Local safeguarding Board		✓
	Health and Wellbeing Boards should ensure local joint strategic Needs Assessments explicitly include children and young people's mental health.	✓	

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	They should also study the needs of different vulnerable groups at risk of developing mental health problems, to assess current and future need and inform commissioning strategies		
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Area of concern	Recommendation	Actions in place	Actions to be considered/ developed
Adolescents in Need	Local authorities, through Local Safeguarding Children Boards, should review and monitor access to mental health support for children who have experienced abuse and trauma. They should ensure that such services are commissioned locally and that there are policies in place for priority access to services for all children who need it	✓	
	All mental health services should have policies in place on transitions for young people from vulnerable groups between the levels of CAMHS services and the transition to adult services. This will ensure that children do not fall through the cracks of services, and that they have continuous access to mental health support. Policies on transitions should outline how CAMHS will work with other agencies in planning transition	✓	
	Every local authority needs to have a welfare assistance scheme which does not exclude 16 and 17 year olds from support	✓	
Children who go missing from home or care	Every child or teenager who goes missing or absent from home or care should be offered an independent return interview	✓	
Early Intervention	Prioritise resources raised through business rate growth for early intervention services, using local needs assessments and open consultation with local residents	✓	
Immigration	Local authorities should ensure the systematic collection of data for separated children with non-asylum immigration claims	✓	
	Local authorities should train social workers and independent Reviewing Officers in the identification of children who are out of scope for legal aid, and in how to best support their legal needs within this new and complex territory	✓	
Poverty	Councils should exempt care leavers from paying council tax until to the age of 21		✓
	Every local authority should have a debt collection strategy which includes measures to address the impact of collection on children		✓
	Councils should not engage bailiffs for collecting		✓

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	council tax debt from families who are in receipt of Council Tax Support and have children		
	Local authorities should use community hubs as locations to deliver outreach debt advice and fuel poverty work, to ensure hard to reach families are able to access the service and support	✓	

<b>Area of concern</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Actions in place</b>	<b>Actions to be considered/developed</b>
	Local authorities should advertise and promote the Warm Home Discount - a rebate of £140 on electricity bills for the most vulnerable - in services that families access, such as children's centres	✓	
	Local authorities need to consider the impact of changes to disability benefits under UC on families. The loss of SDP is likely to be particularly severe. There will be a need to reconsider support services in light of this	✓	
	Local authorities have a key role to play in ensuring that families with children that need Alternative Payment Arrangements under Universal Credit are able to receive them	✓	
	Local authorities need to consider access to online provision of UC for local families - particularly for those requiring regular updates to claims, such as parents with childcare costs	✓	

**5. Actions**

5.1. The following actions will be followed up, in accordance with improving outcomes for local children:

- 1) Children's Social Care to work with the Housing Department to explore possibility of commitment that no child under 18 can be made intentionally homeless.
- 2) To consider whether sufficiency report dealing with Housing Options for 16 and 17 year olds should go to the Safeguarding Board as well as Corporate Parenting Board.
- 3) Children's Social Care to explore whether care leavers can be exempt from paying council tax up until the age of 21.
- 4) The Acting Tackling Poverty Coordinator will support any work to ensure PCC debt collection is appropriate and effective, taking into account the impact on families.

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- 5) The Acting Tackling Poverty Coordinator continues to review assistance schemes and online advice annually in April, and amend it during the year for any changes in provision. Learning links are launching a second-hand furniture store in Portsmouth that will offer help to people who are unable to afford essential household items, which will help us to understand more about this need and how it can be met. This offer, and how to access it, will be included in the online advice once it is available.

Signed by (Director of Children's Services)

**Appendices:**

Appendix 1 - The Children's Society - Children's Lives in Portsmouth report

**Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location