

## **EDUCATION, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL**

Minutes of the meeting of the Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel held on Monday, 16 September 2019 at 4.15 pm in Conference Room B, floor 2, Civic Offices

### **Present**

Councillors Frank Jonas (in the Chair)

Tom Coles  
Hannah Hockaday  
Jeanette Smith

### **Officers**

Sarah Daly, Director of Children, Families and Education  
Julia Katherine, Head of Inclusion

Natalie Abraham, Manager, Portsmouth Parent Voice

#### **11. Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ben Dowling and Jason Fazackarley.

#### **Declarations of Members' Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **12. Minutes of the Previous Meeting - 15 July 2019**

**RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel held on 15 July 2019 be noted as a correct record subject to the following amendment:** clarify that the "recent inspection" was for the SEND local area including health as well as local authority services.

#### **13. Review into support for children with disabilities**

Natalie Abraham, Manager of Portsmouth Parent Voice (PPV):

Natalie pointed out that the information on page 31 of the pack about coffee mornings and information sessions held in partnership with Autism Hampshire is incorrect as their case load is so huge. However, PPV works with Autism Hampshire to share information and pass on referrals. PPV works mostly with parents and carers. A lot of PPV's work is done through social media. PPV can access a range of advice across the country which they can then share with parents. PPV's strongest point is co-production and there is now a sub-group to cover all their projects.

In response to members' questions Ms Abraham explained that

There is more separation now with Hampshire, for example, in order to access Enableability's services children and young people need a Gateway card which is only available to Hampshire residents. This means Portsmouth children miss

out. Autism Hampshire's services are more for people aged over 25 whereas PPV are more for people aged under 25. PPV could benefit from Autism Hampshire's impact and vice versa as it strengthens co-production but it is still helpful having them under the same roof (Frank Sorrell Centre).

Questions of access to Autism Hampshire's services are for Hampshire County Council as they partly fund Autism Hampshire. PPV try to meet their own criteria; they have never heard anyone else specify "Portsmouth only." PPV do not turn parents away and would still support and signpost residents who live outside Portsmouth. Over the summer about four parents from Hampshire contacted PPV. They lived outside Portsmouth but their children attended school in Portsmouth. Portsmouth may be an island but children participate in activities outside it. People need accurate and up-to-date information.

Last term PPV received at least 50 phone calls plus emails and enquiries via social media. Enquiries were dealt with individually. PPV keeps a tally on "what's trending?" CAMHS (Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services) is a big issue at the moment because of waiting times. PPV receives school admission enquiries and even though they are not open over the school holidays they supported the parents and encouraged them to keep in touch with the school.

Organisations always have criteria for access to their services which is understandable. For example, children with Down's Syndrome need more in-depth support from CAMHS but are not eligible unless they attend a special school. Children with autism, ADHD or mental health issues fall through the gap.

#### Post-meeting note from Julia Katherine

Enable Ability are commissioned to provide separate services/activities to both Hampshire and Portsmouth children.

Hampshire residents have access to the Hampshire Youth Project

<https://www.enableability.org.uk/hampshire-youth-project>,

They also have access to the Junior Club, which is not funded by Portsmouth Short Breaks; however, it is open to children from Portsmouth and South East Hampshire children. <https://www.enableability.org.uk/advice-support-services/childrens-services/junior-club>. The Junior Club is funded by Hampshire Short Breaks hence the need to have a Gateway Card. Enableability, the provider, have confirmed that if they have space for a Portsmouth child they will not turn them away.

Portsmouth commissions a Youth Hub for 5 - 18 year olds that is a similar provision.

#### School admissions

There are some positive school experiences but a few children had no placement or the placement had fallen through as their needs could not be met. Some parents had received letters that were eight months old. One EHCP (Education, Health & Care Plan) specified a particular school then the child was allocated to another school.

Officers explained that the admission process for special schools is different from that of mainstream schools. The SEND team will place the child in a special school and the schools can only refuse to accept a child if they cannot meet the child's needs as specified in the EHCP or if the provision required would be "incompatible with the education of other children." Parents want schools to give a positive message that their children are welcomed.

Academies (which are now the majority of schools in Portsmouth) are subject to the same SEN Code of Practice. The law applies to all schools. There are only a very few children who do not have a school place and that is usually children who have just moved to Portsmouth or are moving between schools. Proactive work around inclusion had paid off e.g. publication of 'Ordinarily Available Provision' guidance for schools which sets out the support that can be expected to be made available in any school in the city. It is important to ensure inclusion is at the forefront of policy.

The Portsmouth Inclusive Education Quality Mark (a Portsmouth initiative) recognises good inclusive practice in schools. This was also recognised in the recent inspection. The new Ofsted framework now has a greater focus on the ethos of the school, attendance and inclusive practice and not just results. Members noted targets are a big problem and a worry for parents. Milton Park had an autism additionally resourced provision but this was not mentioned in the Ofsted report. Officers said that they would expect specialist provision in schools to be recognised in any inspection report.

There are currently (at the time of the meeting) 195 children with disabilities open to Children's Services and 59 open to Early Help. There are 106 children "in need" because of their disability. There are five children subject to child protection due to safeguarding concerns. There are 69 looked after children where their families cannot look after them. Shared Care is where children spend some nights in respite but they are considered as looked after children despite their parents still engaging with them. There are 15 care leavers and there is still work to do on pathways for preparing for adulthood. Care has to be taken care leavers do not fall off the cliff edge.

The fact there are more boys than girls with disabilities is a national trend. The larger number of children with disabilities in the north of the city is thought to be due to the larger houses there that can be more easily adapted to meet their needs. However, there is a high number of children with disabilities in Charles Dickens ward and there is a correlation between poverty and disability. Until recently the Children's Disability social work team was a standalone team, but disability social workers have now been co-located with the locality teams so that any safeguarding concerns can be acted on more quickly.

#### Beechside

Beechside is excellent local provision and provides breaks and respite. There are currently 51 children there. There is other targeted provision via Enableability and the pre-paid cards, which allow families more flexibility and control to over the help they purchase and to be less dependent on Children's Services.

There are about 30 children in placements outside Portsmouth as they have very complex needs which cannot be met at Beechside, Portsmouth's only residential facility, so PCC has to look for placements throughout the country (England or UK?) as it is a market with a high level of demand. Out of city placements are not ideal and can be distressing for families as it is difficult for them to visit but needs have to be considered first.

While it is expensive to buy placements outside the city it could be equally expensive for Portsmouth to have its own unit. In addition, a single unit might not be able to cope with a mix of children and meet very different needs. PCC pays its care officers better than other local authorities. Out of city placements comprise an education package and care needs.

Other local authorities send children to Portsmouth but the numbers are very small. Portsmouth uses a lower percentage of city placements than other local authorities; they do not make economic sense. Out of city placements are long-term residential placements - 170 days respite or permanent placements.

With cases of domestic abuse contact with the family is agreed at times when the perpetrator is not in the home. Sometimes circumstances may have changed. Contact visits can be arranged at locations other than Beechside.

Short notice breaks can be accommodated at Beechside depending on capacity and the other children's needs. At the time of the meeting it is just about full and there is not a waiting list.

Two to three years ago it was decided not to open Beechside every day so it is open for just half the week. There is currently a review of need and there is the capacity to open it all week if needed. The cost of extending provision to full-time use would have to be considered.

Placing a child in respite is a significant step for families. It affects the quality of time parents can spend with each other or their other children. The breaks are funded by the local authority.

Ms Abraham said there was a lot of confusion about what is on offer. There needs to be a clear pathway to what services and help are available and how to access them. Parents need to be asked what they want. There are some good packages of care and good examples but some families miss out.

The gap in provision is short breaks. Families do not want their children to go away for six months as they can usually cope quite well but need support before the situation reaches crisis point. They should not have to ask how to get a social worker. Sometimes there are problems contacting an allocated social worker. Sometimes parents go to the GP who send them to PPV.

The pre-paid cards are good but families need to know how to obtain or use the cards to get the day, night or a weekend off to avoid ending up in crisis.

There is good communication between PPV and the local authority. Although communication is not so good with children's Social Care this is improving. You

have to ask parents what they need. There are good services in Portsmouth but parents do not always know about them.

Officers said the Portsmouth Local Offer website is a one-stop-shop of information about all of the service available in the city for children and young people with disabilities and their families. PCC is in the process of recommissioning this website in co-production with parents/carers and young people.

Officers said that to access Beechside there is an eligibility threshold then an assessment of need. If children do not meet the threshold for Beechside there is a specialist then a targeted offer, then there is a short break card which is topped up annually. There are 1,600 children who have an EHCP and just under 600 of those have a pre-paid card. There is the specialist holiday play scheme then the targeted 1 offer of open access recreational activities such as the Teenage Holiday Programme.

Ms Abraham said the pathway was good but it needs to be made clear to parents how they can access social care and respite. There is a lot of anxiety amongst families with older teenagers about finding a suitable break that does not separate the family. The biggest demands for a break is for children aged 11 to 16 as parents are tired as teenagers are more hard work, more demanding and more physical. Families with children under 11 feel supported.

#### CAMHS

With regard to the relationship with CAMHS the council can influence them as they commission them. There is currently a review to consider what services PCC want and how and when they are offered. There is a national shortage of trained qualified staff locally and nationally. Waiting lists are fairly low compared with other local authorities. PCC has been successful in bidding for additional funding for mental health support in schools. PPV has been involved in the bid and surveys families before each quarterly meeting which CAMHS will attend. Two mental health support teams will be put into three localities in Portsmouth. Workers are training now and will go into schools.

Members agreed they would like to visit Beechside and meet parents at PPV, if possible on the same day. The visit to PPV would have to be from 10 am to 12 noon at the Frank Sorrell Centre.

#### **14. Next meeting**

The next meeting will be a joint visit to PPV and Beechside.

The meeting concluded at 5.15 pm.

Signed

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Councillor Frank Jonas (Chair)