

EDUCATION, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting of the Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel held on Thursday, 30 January 2020 at 5.00 pm at the Civic Offices, Portsmouth

Present

Councillors Frank Jonas BEM (in the Chair)
Jason Fazackarley
Hannah Hockaday
Jeanette Smith

1. Apologies for absence (AI 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Dowling and Councillor Coles.

2. Declarations of interest (AI 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 September 2019 (AI 3)

Julia Katherine advised that there were a few corrections needed on page 3 of the minutes as follows:

Paragraph 1, the following text should be added before the second sentence - 'The SEND team are responsible for school placement for all children with EHCP's in special schools or mainstream schools.'

Paragraph 3 - The additional text in bold to be added: 'The Portsmouth Inclusive Education Quality Mark (a Portsmouth initiative) recognises good inclusive practice in schools. This was also recognised in the recent **SEND Local Area inspection in July 2019**'.

Paragraph 3 - The additional text in bold to be added: 'Officers said that they would expect specialist provision in schools to be recognised in any **school** inspection report'.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2019 be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the above amendments.

4. Review into support for children with disabilities (AI 4)

Councillor Jonas advised that he had attended the Portsmouth Parent Voice Coffee morning along with Councillors Smith and Dowling on 7 November. He invited Councillor Smith to give her feedback on the visit. Notes from the visits were previously circulated to the panel along with some additional comments from Dr Katherine clarifying some of the points raised.

Councillor Smith said she had found the visit very 'hard hitting' due to some of the experiences the parents had shared and some parents had been quite damning about Portsmouth City Council. Issues that were raised included that they were not included in decision making, were not receiving phone calls and did not feel supported. Parents they had spoken to had been very upset about the pre-paid cards reducing by £50 and did not understand the local offer or where to go for information. She added though that at the time of the coffee morning, the council had been considering limiting the use of the pre-paid cards. Councillor Horton at her recent Education Cabinet decision meeting did not agree to this. Councillor Smith said she had been pleased about that as a lot of parents were extremely concerned about this.

Councillor Smith got the impression that Portsmouth Parent Voice had become a one stop shop for parents and some parents had said that there was not enough support for families. Most families spoken to at the visit were working as well as caring for their child(ren) and some families were struggling to function. Some parents said that going to work was their only respite.

Some parents whose children were in mainstream schools said that the schools are constantly phoning parents to collect their child as they cannot cope with their behaviour in a school environment. Councillor Smith felt that this might be that children are in the wrong place or that schools are not equipped to deal with the needs of the child. Parents had felt that the situation with secondary schools was woeful as they did not fully understand how to deal with their child's additional needs or behaviours. At primary level the situation was better and members heard positive stories about how colleges are dealing with their child's additional needs. Some parents reported though that children often hide any issues they are having at school and let this out when they get home which causes issues with home life. Parents felt that no-one asks about this so they have to cope alone.

Some parents were using their pre-paid cards on taxis for schools. Parents were aware that the home to school transport budget is over budget but felt that they had not been asked what their child needs. When members asked the parents what the council could do to improve the situation they mentioned working with parents to establish their needs. They also mentioned the council tax precept and more joined up services so all professionals work together. Parents had been very grateful for the members for attending the coffee morning to hear their views.

Councillor Jonas added that the main thing he took away from the visit to the PPV coffee morning was that parents had felt there was a severe lack of communication with them. In response to a question Ms Daly (Assistant Director Children and Families) explained that the authority undertake assessments based on child needs which inform the care plan and package. This focusses on the child's needs, the needs of the family also the environment and local community to look at the holistic needs of the child and family.

Dr Julia Katherine (Head of Inclusion) was invited to comment on what the members had fed back. She said she did not recognise the picture painted from the feedback. Dr Katherine said many of the issues raised in the feedback were outside of the scope of this scrutiny review. She said that she would be happy to provide background information about any of the issues that had been mentioned in the feedback but that she had not as yet been asked to do so as none of these areas were within the scope of the scrutiny panel review. She said that it was important that panel members had access to accurate and comprehensive information in order to enable them to come to valid conclusions and to make informed recommendations.

Dr Katherine reminded members that in July 2019 the authority were inspected by Ofsted and CQC where it was recognised as one of the best in the country for provision for SEND. Ofsted met with over 60 parents/carers in an open meeting and over 500 parents responded to the council's survey, of which 85% reported that they felt listened to.

Councillor Fazackarley suggested in light of these concerns the panel may wish to consider inviting Councillor Horton as Cabinet member to the next meeting to provide evidence for the review.

The panel considered the possibility of widening the current review to include all SEND provision. Members felt it was important to get the offer right for parents and parents have a big part to play in that. There were 20-25 parents present at the coffee morning and they were all saying the same thing. It was felt that this needed to be part of the review to improve the offer.

Ms Daly said it was distressing to hear the views of the parents. The SEND inspection was very thorough and this was one of the best reports in the country. She said she would appreciate giving the panel some more detailed information. The Chair said that if there was more information that could be provided to the panel on the wider subject of SEND provision that would be sensible.

Dr Katherine said that if the scope of the review were to change the panel would need to start from scratch. The panel were also reminded that changing the scope would mean the Scrutiny Management Panel would need to approve this prior to commencing the review.

Councillor Hockaday said the council's record of completing of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) within 20 weeks is fantastic. In response to a question Dr Katherine said that the EHCP completion rate was 99.5% in Portsmouth compared to 60% nationally. The authority have received letters of commendations about this and the authority was very strong in this area. Every child with an EHCP has an annual review each year. For some this may be from age range 0-25. The authority prioritise the annual reviews for those coming up for a phase transfer to ensure that children receive the support they need and that no child loses out following any requests for change of placement. The authority are on track for completion of all phase transfers reviews by the statutory date of 15th February. As part of the process

of carrying out all new EHCP needs assessments and annual reviews, parents/carers are invited to a meeting in school to 'co-produce' the EHCP.

Feedback from Beechside visit.

Councillor Smith said this had been a very positive visit and the staff and care provided were excellent. The downside to the service was the waiting list. There are 15 children on the waiting list and 30 referrals and this was disappointing. It seems that Beechside needs more beds or a bigger facility as they are at maximum capacity. She felt that the authority needed to look at the provision. Two years ago Beechside went from opening seven days a week down to five days a week due to needing to make savings of £120,000. This has had an impact on the service that is provided. Councillor Smith felt this was an excellent provision and she would like more children and parents to be able to benefit from the provision and the respite it gives.

Councillor Jonas endorsed these comments and said the members had been able to watch the interaction between staff and the children and it was excellent. He agreed that options for expanding the service should be investigated as having children on the waiting list was having an impact on families. This however would have cost implications. The panel noted that unfortunately authority's budgets are cut year on year and there is not the money to provide everything anymore and there were so many areas that were a priority. Members felt this was a remarkable service that could be better if it had more money available.

Ms Daly said that the staff at Beechside do an amazing job and was pleased that members had the opportunity to visit the service. Previously the authority had made the decision to reduce the provision at Beechside as there was not the demand to require it to open seven days a week. Savings were made as opening seven days was not needed, however the authority was now in a different position with children on the waiting list. The Council would need to look at what the cost would be to open the service for the additional two days. She said if the panel feel that's the need they would need to consider how to meet this need alongside the other priorities in an ever demanding environment. The children using the service are the most vulnerable children and families cope with most incredible situations with their children. Beechside allowed children to remain at home. She was reassured the members had a positive experience of visiting Beechside as it is such a great service.

Future meetings

Officers would meet to discuss what additional information to share with the panel and any additional future meetings.

The meeting concluded at 5.40 pm.

Councillor Frank Jonas BEM
Chair