

EDUCATION, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting of the Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel held on Wednesday, 20 September 2023 at 6.00 pm at the Civic Offices, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Brian Madgwick (in the Chair)

Councillors Mary Vallely
Hannah Brent
Peter Candlish

28. Apologies for absence (AI 1)

There were no apologies for absence.

29. Declarations of members' interests (AI 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

30. Minutes of previous meeting - 13 July 2023 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on 13 July 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

31. Review into education, employment and training opportunities for our care experienced young people aged 18-25 (AI 4)

Sarah Read, Service Leader

Sarah explained that care experienced young adults no longer have a social worker but instead have a personal advisor (PA). These provide the young people with support into work, education or training and they also provide support in finding housing, managing finances and provide emotional support. Their view of their role is that they walk alongside the young people whilst they make their choices, and the PAs can pick them up when they make mistakes.

Portsmouth has high levels of young adults not in education, employment, or training (NEET). Motivation can be one of the main barriers the young adults are facing when it comes to getting into education, employment, or training, as well as opportunity. Some of our young people are working full time and there are 12 of our young people at university currently. We have young people with high aspirations who have had a smooth journey through the care system and may have been with the same foster carers so feel very settled and secure. This is not always the case for care experienced young adults. A lack of confidence due to their previous experiences is one of the things that really impacts their motivation. It also gets impacted by their negative

experiences within education. Often children in care have moved placements and have had to change schools' multiple times which has affected their confidence and this impacts on the young people far more than we realise. There is a lot of provision that is suitable for the young people to access, but when they are put into college settings they can struggle to get through the door as it is another new setting, and they lack the confidence.

Sarah gave an example of when she was the Staying Close Manager and she had to take a young person to College. Several young females came out of the hairdressing section with beautiful hair and fashionable clothes and the young woman beside her visibly shrunk; she did not have glossy hair and she had poor quality clothes, none of which was affecting her confidence. Barriers such as this are not often acknowledged.

In response to a question Sarah said that the young woman lived independently, and she had to support her to leave her home to go to college. She did not have any clean clothes or have a choice of outfits and there was not time to take her shopping for clothes that morning. Her PA did later take her shopping for clothes and helped her with a weekly washing routine. The key thing was to get her into college that day, otherwise she would have been asked to leave.

The Council works with Shaping Portsmouth and have been able to secure some placements through them with local employers. One of the young men really struggled to get himself to work and do a full day's work on a building site. When the PA discussed this with them they found out it was because he was hungry. He had been on universal credit then switched to a work situation and did not have enough money for lunch or the bus to get to work. It was agreed to buy him a meal deal each day so that he was not hungry and had the energy to complete a full day's work. Sometimes the young people are on medication due to anxiety and these medications can affect motivation and energy levels. Another effect of coming from a traumatised background is poor sleep routine which impacts on work. Some young people have often grown up in households where there is a different work ethic and not experience of people going to work. This impacts on their motivation for going to work. Neurodiversity can also impact, especially around communication. This makes it very difficult for them in a workplace as if there is an issue, they may not have the communication skills to deal with this. Due to a lack of confidence many will not go back to the workplace and they become too overwhelmed.

Many care experienced young adults have experienced abuse and neglect and they quickly realise that the only person they can rely upon is themselves, which can impact on their ability to work in a team and to easily trust other people. She felt that it was vital to build up the young people's skills so that they can build up their confidence and be ready to enter the workplace and manage any conflict they face. Care experienced young adults can also need help to manage their time and to be somewhere by a certain time, use public transport or plan ahead. PAs spend a great deal of time helping the young people with these skills when they start on a college course or start

employment. The team provide financial help towards clothes for interviews or the workplace as they often do not have suitable clothes.

When young people first start a college course or job, they feel that they are different and feel judged. The team are working with employers to ensure that the young people receive a welcoming and supporting environment, with an extra bit of nurture.

The panel then heard case studies from Emma Hayward, Personal Advisor and Hannah Woods, Team Leader.

What the service would like to see:

- Sarah Read said that care experienced young adults have had a lot of barriers to overcome and she would like to see work tasters being developed particularly within the Portsmouth City Council, as the Corporate Parent, where every directorate was committed to offering a certain number of work tasters. These could be two half days at first which could gradually be built on so they can gradually see what it is like to go to work and there is no pressure if they miss a day and feeling like they have failed.
- Staff would also like training to be made available to staff at the Council so they understand the impact that trauma has on care experienced young adults, as it is highly underestimated.
- Mentors in workplaces would also be welcomed so the young people have someone to go to for support. PAs do a fantastic job including giving young people lifts to work, phone check ins, texts to check they are out of bed and going to work and go above and beyond. The service are now offering financial support around clothing, support for travel to work and money towards haircuts all to make them feel more confident for going to work.
- Sarah said they would also like to see colleges providing more support. The City of Portsmouth College do a lot of work tasters but it would be great if this could be extended to include care experienced young people. Also for the colleges to understand the effects of trauma on a young person as sometimes their programmes are very rigid. It is important to allow the care experienced young person an extra chance.
- More communication between the providers and the Council would be welcomed when getting the care experienced young adults onto courses.

Adam Murphy, Participation Worker

Adam explained that his role is to ensure that there are systems and processes for the voice of children and young people who access their support to be heard by decision makers. He also manages and supervises care experienced young adults as part of his team. The Council completes a survey each year for young people and 62% of the care experienced young people completed this. 86% said they felt supported by their PAs in relation to education, employment, and training. This had increased by 8% on last year which was positive.

From a management perspective, they have supported 9 since 2014, 6 of these completed apprenticeships. The Customer Service and Housing teams at the Council successfully supported a care experienced young person each to obtain an apprenticeship.

Challenges:

- As employers the support structure begins and ends during the work day, support is not available at weekends or evenings.
- Housing creates a significant challenge for the young people as if they do not have stable housing it presents a number of challenges and ability to attend work.
- Employers must accept that the young people will have good and bad days.
- A significant lack of external relationships, PAs are a massive support but that is only one person and they do not often have very big peer groups to encourage them.
- Working at a local authority is a significant environmental shift for the young people. Explaining where to get tea and coffee and what to do on a lunchbreak can cause anxiety for them.
- In 2017 the statutory responsibility to support care experienced young people was extended to age 25. A lot of care experienced young people are accessing the support longer and are more ready for an apprenticeship when they are in their early 20s. In November 2022 Adam had 14 applicants for one apprenticeship and all of them were very strong candidates.

In response to questions the following points were clarified:

- PAs come from a variety of backgrounds and there is a good team of committed people at the Council. Staff are honest with candidates at the interview stage about what the job entails and the demands. They also have a group of young people at the interview and a Q&A session takes place with Sarah and a team leader and then 20 minutes with the young people asking questions. The young people are asked to write down their feedback which is looked at against the scoring and a decision is made. If the young people say they do not feel they could talk to or trust the candidate this is all considered when the decision whether to appoint is made. It is crucial that they can engage easily with the young people.
- PAs and foster carers are all trained in trauma informed model of care (TIMOC). Sarah was unsure what training programme the City of Portsmouth College offers staff, and this should be discussed with them. It is a struggle when there are young people with different needs and she felt the Council should work with the City of Portsmouth College and South Downs to provide training and help with that.
- More support is needed around mental health issues and the team are working with health colleagues on that currently about what offer is needed in the city.
- From an employment perspective, all young people have access to the employer assistance programme which is a traumatic experience

for them. Trauma is a lifelong experience and it was important to get other people in the community more informed that trauma is important, rather than getting the young person to adapt.

- The opportunities for work experience within the Council has been raised through the Corporate Parenting Board. Once a young person is settled, safe and secure they bring a lot to the team; they have a lot of skills. If you can get the right person in the right place with the right support then they can thrive and this can give the employer a long term employee, trained to the appropriate level then they will stay as stability means a lot.
- The Employment Academy work is due to start on Monday and as part of that work is taking place with the different directorates to look at opportunities within the city. They will also be looking at all those services the Council contracts with and looking whether it is possible to build in a social element to ring fence roles for care experienced young people.

Members noted that the next meeting was on Wednesday 18 October at 4pm where education providers would be in attendance.

It was agreed that the November meeting would be on Thursday 9th November with a provisional time of 4:30pm. Officers would liaise on how to best get the views of care experienced young adults. Mike Stoneman would confirm arrangements in due course and the timing of the meeting may need to change.

The meeting concluded at 7.10 pm.

Councillor Brian Madgwick
Chair