

AT A MEETING of the CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ADVISORY PANEL of HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL held at The Castle, Winchester on 7 October 2010.

Chairman:
p Councillor M.J. Tucker

Councillors:

a A. Evans	a D. Keast
p Mrs Charlotte Bailey	p Roz Muschamp
p R. Bolton	p Mrs Pamela Mutton
p B.D. Dash	p Mrs Jackie Porter

24. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from councillors A. Evans, D. Keast and the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services Councillor R. Perry.

25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were mindful that where they believed they had a personal or prejudicial interest in any matter considered at the meeting declared that interest at the time of the relevant debate and, having regard to the circumstances described in paragraphs 9, 10, 11 and 12 of the County Council's Code of Conduct, considered whether to leave the meeting whilst the matter was discussed, save for exercising any right to speak in accordance with paragraph 12 of the code.

Councillor Jackie Porter declared a personal interest as the Chair of Trustees of an organisation that receives funding from Hampshire County Council.

26. MINUTES

The minutes from the meeting of 1 June 2010 were agreed to be a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

27. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed all Members and Officers to the meeting.

Tribute was paid to the late Councillor Kirk and the contribution he had made to the safeguarding of young people in Hampshire as Executive Member for Children's Services. The details of a memorial service on 16 November 2010 were announced.

It was confirmed that Councillor Roy Perry had been appointed new Executive Member for Children's Services. The significance of Councillor Perry also being Deputy Leader of the Council was noted.

A recent creative summer school event attended by the Chairman was described to the Panel. It was a positive event that brought noticeable benefit to the young people involved.

The Chairman confirmed that at the request of Members, the Panel's terms of reference had been re-distributed for reference.

28. VISITS TO CHILDREN'S HOMES

The Panel considered the report of the Director of Children's Services (Item 5 in the Minute Book) regarding Members' visits to Children's Homes.

It was explained that the aim of these visits was to build an understanding and awareness of the work of the Children's Homes amongst Panel Members. Some visits had already taken place and others were already scheduled. It was noted that Councillor Keast had visited Swanwick Lodge secure unit since publication of the report.

Panel Members who had paid a visit to a Children's Home related their impressions and experiences to the Panel. This included visits to: Merrydale, Milesdown, Godbey House, Cypress Lodge and Firvale. The visits were reported to be positive and Members were impressed with the atmosphere and facilities they had seen.

Concerns were raised regarding denied access to the river and to a trampoline on health and safety grounds at Milesdown. The Director of Children's Services agreed with the Members' assertion that Children in care should have as normal a childhood as possible but also pointed out that risk assessments were a necessary tool for the authority to fulfil its duty of care. The Director agreed to review the relevant risk assessments at Milesdown and report back directly on the outcome.

Surprise was expressed regarding the number of staff at Godbey House. The Director of Children's Services explained the rationale behind staff ratios and pointed out that this was a key reason for the high cost of residential care and why it was crucially important that the right children were placed who could most benefit from this type of placement.

It was agreed that follow-up visits would be beneficial to better understand the operation of the homes and Members who had not yet had an opportunity to visit their designated home were keen to do so. It was suggested that visits in the company of each Home's "Reg-33 Visitor" would provide suitable opportunities for an accompanied visit in the first instance. The Director of Children's Services suggested that to

make Members aware of which officer to liaise with, a list of the reg-33 visitors be circulated to the Panel.

It was resolved that:

- A regular visiting schedule for Panel members to each of Hampshire County Council's Children's Homes be established.
- Feedback from these visits is included as a standing item on the Panel's meeting agenda.
- A list of reg-33 visitors be circulated to Panel members.
- An electronic copy of the proforma (appendix 2 in the minute book) be circulated to Panel members for future reference.
- The Director of Children's Services provide feedback on specific points raised directly to Panel members.

29. **SOCIAL WORK TASK FORCE AND SOCIAL WORK REFORM BOARD – INFORMATION AND UPDATE**

The Panel considered the report of the Director of Children's Services (Item 6 in the Minute Book) on the progress of the Social Work Task Force and its implications for Hampshire County Council.

At the invitation of the Chairman, two newly qualified social workers, a workforce development manager and a social work team manager joined the meeting to provide an insight into the training and development of social workers in Hampshire County Council.

The Director of Children's Services outlined the background and the three strands of the Social Work Taskforce. He also highlighted the recent publication of the first part of the Munro review of child protection, which he felt made positive recommendations regarding the framework and statutory processes of social care.

The workforce development manager described the two year programme for newly qualified social workers in Hampshire. The two newly qualified social workers, who were on the programme, explained how it had helped to develop their skills and build their confidence by allowing them to begin with a protected workload and a focus on child in need cases prior to moving on to more complex child protection cases. In response to questions from the Panel, they confirmed that this approach still gave them an introduction to all aspects of the job and that they felt support for their participation in the programme from their more experienced colleagues. The Social Care Manager explained that running the development programme outside the teams both reduced pressure on managers and ensured a consistent approach. At the request of Members, she also explained how workload was planned within teams.

The opportunities for professional development within social work were discussed and it was noted that an aim of the Taskforce was the creation of "higher level practitioners". This would allow development

within practice as an alternative to moving into managerial roles. It was confirmed that Hampshire County Council had already introduced “expert practitioner” roles for similar reasons.

The entry requirements and perceived status of a career in social work were questioned by Members. The Director of Children’s Services confirmed that a degree had always been a requirement and that he was keen to maintain high academic standards. The social workers confirmed that the academic requirements were high, but acknowledged that their professional status was not always recognised by the public. The Director noted a recent recommendation to nationally establish a “Royal College” in recognition of the nature of the profession, which was welcomed by Members.

The social workers and the workforce development manager were thanked for their contribution by the Panel.

It was resolved that:

- The progress of social work development in Hampshire be noted.
- Information on Hampshire’s “expert practitioners” be brought to a future meeting of the Panel.
- An analysis and details of Hampshire’s worker retention policy and the rate of turn-over amongst social workers in Hampshire be presented to a future meeting of the Panel.
- An item detailing how social workers from Children’s Services work together with social workers from Adult Services be brought to a future meeting of the Panel.

30. HAMPSHIRE CHILDREN’S SERVICE INTEGRATED YOUTH SUPPORT SERVICES

The Panel considered the report of the Director of Children’s Services (Item 7 in the Minute Book) regarding integrated youth support services in Hampshire.

The Area Director (Western Area) Children and Families, introduced the report and outlined the way in which different strands were to be integrated into a single service. He confirmed that following user consultation this would be known as the “Youth Support Service”. Access and publicity for the service was expected to be via schools and other youth related communications. Implementation was planned for April 2011.

The Panel was concerned that some youth clubs were facing a shortage of staff as a result of the departmental reorganisation, which was threatening services. The Area Director explained that it was necessary to wait for the results of the HR process before numbers could be re-balanced. The Director of Children’s services agreed with

this and confirmed that there was a focus on the most vulnerable during the transition.

The Local Children's Partnerships were discussed and the Director of Children's Services felt that they provided an ongoing means of delivering services and would continue to be required.

The Panel questioned how the service would reduce the number of children living in poverty and reduce the number of teenage conceptions. The Director explained that poverty was also strongly connected with employment and the benefit system, but that to the full extent of its remit, the service sought to improve the circumstances of children. He also confirmed that there was considerable monitoring of the teenage conception rate across Hampshire, which revealed substantial variation, although this was not as strongly linked to deprivation as previously thought.

It was resolved that the Panel note the report and would receive further updates at future meetings.

31. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Director of Children's Services confirmed that there were approximately 1085 children in care at the time of the meeting.

A forthcoming child protection training course was discussed and it was agreed that those who were attending would report back at the next meeting.