

At a meeting of the CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ADVISORY PANEL of HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL held at The Castle, Winchester on Tuesday 27 May 2014

Chairman:
p Councillor David Keast

a	Ann Briggs	p	Jackie Porter
p	Rita Burgess	a	Roz Chadd
p	Jacqui England	p	Malcolm Wade
a	Jonathan Glen	p	Christopher Wood

22. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ann Briggs, Roz Chadd and Jonathan Glen.

23. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

All Members who believe they have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any matter to be considered at the meeting must declare that interest and, having regard to the circumstances described in Part 3 Paragraph 1.5 of the County Council's Members' Code of Conduct, leave the meeting while the matter is discussed, save for exercising any right to speak in accordance with Paragraph 1.6 of the Code. Furthermore all Members with a Non-Pecuniary interest in a matter being considered at the meeting should consider whether such interest should be declared, and having regard to Part 5, Paragraph 2 of the Code, consider whether it is appropriate to leave the meeting while the matter is discussed, save for exercising any right to speak in accordance with Code.

No declarations were made at this meeting.

24. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of 4 February 2014 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

25. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman invited Members to provide feedback on recent visits to children's homes within their division. Individual Members of the Panel reported on visits made recently, particularly to The Green House and Cypress Lodge.

26. **FEEDBACK FROM THE CARE AMBASSADORS 'BETTER OUTCOMES CONFERENCE'**

The Panel considered a report of the Director of Children's Services (Item 5 in the Minute Book) regarding the outcomes of the Better Outcomes Conference for Children in Care which was held at the University of Winchester on the 9 January 2014. The Panel also received a presentation from two of the Hampshire County Council Care Ambassadors that included a short film of other Care Ambassadors describing their experiences of being in care.

The Care Ambassadors gave Members their feedback from the Conference, the theme of which was 'Aspirations', and also some of their personal experiences of the care system. Members heard that overall the Conference was a positive and effective experience, and stressed that 'every child matters'. The Care Ambassadors emphasised the importance of their individual voices and concerns being heard through their time spent in care, and especially through sometimes difficult transitional periods. The importance of effective communication between social workers and foster carers was also highlighted.

Members were informed that the SPARK website would go live later in the summer of 2014, which would provide an information portal for young people in care. It was noted that the website would enable young people to log in securely and provide a safe environment to interact with other young people in care and to share experiences, as well as advertising events. The Care Ambassadors and Members were positive about the launch of SPARK and welcomed this initiative.

It was noted that some young people in care had taken advantage of opportunities such as joining volunteer groups, pursuing sporting interests and schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh's award programme. Members heard that care plans helped to identify such interests for further development.

Members expressed concern about the use of black bin bags to convey young people's personal belongings and it was explained that this only occurred in exceptional circumstances such as emergency placements when it wasn't possible to implement a transitional period.

Members thanked the Care Ambassadors for their presentation, complementing the positive impression of care for young people in Hampshire.

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Families Advisory Panel note that this year's Conference was again a resounding success and a reflection of the skill and enthusiasm of Hampshire's Care Ambassadors. From this positive event further work has been identified which will directly, and positively, impact on the services children and young people receive through improvements and changes to practice.

27. OFSTED INSPECTIONS OF HAMPSHIRE CHILDREN 18 FEBRUARY – 12 MARCH 2014

The Panel considered the report of the Director of Children's Services (Item 6 in the Minute Book) regarding a recent Ofsted Inspection of Hampshire Children's Services.

Members were informed that Inspectors visited between 18 February and 12 March 2014, and areas inspected included fostering services, adoption performance and effectiveness of the safeguarding board. Members heard that all areas were reported as good with the exception of adoption performance, and leadership, management and governance which were deemed as outstanding.

It was reported that the department had a timescale of seventy days to provide an action plan to Ofsted on areas for improvement as identified by Inspectors, and Members heard that work on this was being progressed.

Concerns around the high caseload volume of newly qualified Social Workers were discussed and it was explained that work was underway to monitor and track caseloads to ensure manageability.

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Families Advisory Panel note the content and findings of the Ofsted report.

28. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE

The Panel received a report of the Director of Children's Services (Item 7 in the Minute Book) on the work and activity of the Independent Reviewing Service.

The Director gave a summary of the work of the service and reported that the recent Ofsted review was positive about the work of this statutory service. Recommendations made by Ofsted to ensure that Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) had a manageable working capacity would be monitored. Members heard that the workload for IROs had increased significantly over the previous twelve months, due to an increase in caseloads and IROs performing other duties such as chairing Child Protection Conferences. Members noted that staff turnover for the Independent Reviewing Officers was low therefore maintaining consistency within the service, and there were currently 20.5 full time equivalent IRO posts.

The Director reported that increased use of mobile technology was to be piloted and was seen as a potentially effective way of working. Members

noted that particular challenges around this such as data confidentiality, secure storage and transmission were being closely monitored.

Members heard that an audit report of Care Plans for Children in Care was completed in 2013 by IRO's, which focussed on areas including: the implementation of care plans, care plan needs, and participation and contribution to care plans. It was noted that there were 546 surveys completed and returned to each IRO. Each of these evidenced that a care plan was in place, with 86% of plans up to date, and 85% of plans had care needs identified. Members were mindful that some of the figures may be misleading as they didn't identify partially complete care plans, for instance those still requiring a signature from the young person, and/or parents.

Members also noted the continuing work around recruitment and retention of foster carers to increase the placement choice for children and young people.

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Families Advisory Panel note the contents of the Independent Reviewing Service report.