

At a meeting of the CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ADVISORY PANEL of HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL held at The Castle, Winchester on Tuesday 2 February 2016

Chairman:
p Councillor Roz Chadd

p Ann Briggs
p Rita Burgess
p Jacqui England
p Marge Harvey

p Jackie Porter
p Malcolm Wade
p Christopher Wood

67. BROADCASTING ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairman announced that the press and members of the public were permitted to film and broadcast the meeting. Those remaining at the meeting were consenting to being filmed and recorded, and to the possible use of those images and recording for broadcasting purposes.

68. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Cllr Keast.

69. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were mindful that where they believed they had a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any matter considered at the meeting they must declare that interest and, having regard to Part 3, Paragraph 1.5 of the County Council's Members' Code of Conduct, leave the meeting while the matter was discussed, save for exercising any right to speak in accordance with Paragraph 1.6 of the Code. Furthermore Members were mindful that where they believed they had a Personal Interest in a matter being considered at the meeting they considered, having regard to Part 5, Paragraph 4 of the Code, whether such interest should be declared, and having regard to Part 5, Paragraph 5 of the Code, considered whether it was appropriate to leave the meeting while the matter was discussed, save for exercising any right to speak in accordance with the Code.

70. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of 6 October 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

71. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no Chairman's Announcements on this occasion.

72. THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN THE FAMILY COURT

The Panel received a presentation of the Director of Children's Services (Item 5 in the Minute Book) regarding the role of social workers in the Family Court. The process for the Public Law Outline (PLO) was highlighted to members,

along with how social workers approach families while promoting the welfare of the children involved. It was noted to members that the child was best with their family but court proceedings started when this was not achievable alongside considerations for the child's safety.

Members were told that PLO was introduced two years ago and places the social worker as the expert rather than relying on external professionals and it was designed to prevent delay. The panel heard that in Hampshire there were approximately 1324 Children Looked After; 342 of whom were subject to the PLO process. Of the cases that reached PLO, 29% were successfully discharged without the need of care proceedings during 2015.

An overview of the paperwork needed to be presented to courts was also given to members, known as a 'court bundle' and it was explained that social workers were now required to outline all available options and potential outcomes for each child.

PLO has a 26 week target length and in Hampshire 84% of cases fell within this with the average being 24 weeks.

In response to questions members heard that;

- The threshold criterion of 'significant harm' has a legal definition and covers the four areas of abuse; Neglect, Physical, Sexual and Emotional.
- 50% of Troubled Families cases are also Children in Need. However many cases in PLO may have previously been supported by the Troubled Families programme.
- The process is very similar for an unborn child, who may be identified as at risk due to siblings circumstances; a Parenting Assessment is completed in these situations and arrangements made for support.
- Social workers do their best to ensure that parents understand the PLO process and this is supported by the free independent legal advice available.
- The Courts can appoint an independent social worker from CAFCASS to act as the voice of the child and ensure their views are represented.

RESOLVED: That the Children and Families Advisory Panel note the presentation and the role undertaken by Social Workers in the Family Court.

73. **FEEDBACK ON SEN INSPECTION**

The Panel received a report of the Director of Children's Services (Item 6 in the Minute Book) with feedback from the recent pilot OFSTED/CQC inspection into the Special Educational Needs provision in the local area. The inspection focused on the early identification and the effectiveness of meeting need while improving outcomes and creating a strong parent focus and emphasis on a person centred approach. There was a strong focus on the outcomes of provision, rather than the provision itself.

The panel heard that overall the inspection has been considered a positive experience and areas of strength have been identified along with key areas of development.

The panel heard that as this was a pilot inspection, the local authority had been invited to give feedback on the inspection experience. In summary this

feedback included the need for further clarity over what constitutes the 'local area', the need for key lines of enquiry both for the inspection as a whole, for every meeting, to ensure the correct people were present and the 7pm webinar being at an inappropriate time for parent participation.

In response to questions members heard that;

- It was for Local Authorities to carry out assessments and decide whether an EHCP should be agreed for post 16s, ensuring that they be treated the same as their peers and not limited in their college choices due to the plan.
- OFSTED Inspectors are selected based on context and experience so they can be rigorous for inspections of all school types.
- The notional 30,000 children on SEN support in Hampshire include those who may only come under SEN for a short period of time.
- Health were involved with the inspection and there is now more of a shared priority re their involvement in the process, so colleagues in health are setting up groups accordingly.

RESOLVED: That the Children & Families Advisory Panel note the report and the actions taken.

74. **UPDATE ON FOSTERING SERVICES**

The Panel received a presentation of the Director of Children's Services (Item 7 in the Minute Book) with an update of the fostering services over the last 3 years and an outline for the next 12 months.

Members received an outline of the Foster Carer Workforce as of December 2015; 367 County Carers who would be unknown to the children, 122 Connected Carer who are family members and 28 Family Link who provide care for disabled children. This made a total of 517 Foster Carers with 706 children placed with In House Foster Carer's and 299 children placed with Independent Foster Carers.

The panel heard that Foster Carers were divided into three skill levels; Level 1 made up 53% and typically dealt with children under the age of 10 and maximum sibling groups of 2, Level 2 made up 31% and typically dealt with children aged 5-15 and maximum sibling groups of three and Level 3 made up 16% and typically dealt with those aged 11-18 years and were the most skilled Foster Carers with at least one fulltime at home.

Members heard how the Fostering Service advertised and recruited new carers using a variety of methods including their website and social media, mail drops and bus and radio advertising. Members of Hampshire County Council's workforce have also been taking part in marathons with branded shirts to raise awareness.

Foster Carers are continually engaged with and supported with on going training pathways, supervision and education themed workshops. Members also heard that long standing Foster Carers in Hampshire have received New Year Honours.

In response to questions members heard that;

- Foster Care placements can vary in length between one night and several years.
- Funding for Foster Care is not ring-fenced and there is currently a review into the pay being undertaken to establish if an increase would lead to a cost effective increase in prospective Foster Carers.
- The training offered is appreciated and thought to be comprehensive and the option of a buddy Foster Carer is popular. The lack of continuity with social workers is considered the least beneficial aspect of the process however.

RESOLVED: That the Children & Families Advisory Panel receive and note the work and outcomes of the Fostering Service in Hampshire.