

AT A MEETING of the CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ADVISORY PANEL of HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL held at The Castle, Winchester on 1 June 2010.

Chairman:
p Councillor M.J. Tucker

Councillors:

p 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

Also present at the invitation of the Chairman: Councillor D.A. Kirk (for part of the meeting) and Care Ambassadors Stacey Hardy and Joe Sutton (for Item 5 only).

16. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

17. 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.

18. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed all Members and Officers to the meeting.

19. MEET MEMBERS OF THE CARE COUNCIL (CARE AMBASSADORS)

Two of Hampshire County Council's Care Ambassadors, Stacey Hardy and Joe Sutton were presented to the Panel and their backgrounds and experiences were outlined.

Stacey and Joe described their roles as advocates for children currently in care and drew on their own experiences of being in the

system as well as their attendance at workshops led by the Dreamwall charity to highlight issues in different aspects of service. Issues raised included:

- levels of contact and relationships with friends and family,
- the importance of continuity, support and trust in the relationship between children and social workers,
- the difficulty of becoming integrated into carers families,
- the disruption and distress caused by frequent placement changes, and
- the perception of being different and the difficulty of not having access to the same activities and opportunities as children who are not in care.

It was confirmed that the care ambassadors keep in touch with current children in care and that steps were being taken to link them with children in care teams in order to feed in their comments.

The difficulties of coping with normal growing up anxieties in a care environment was raised. It was confirmed that there is a possibility that normal issues can be more difficult to deal with in a care environment. Steps were being taken to communicate to carers the leisure activities and opportunities that are available in order to support children in care not missing out on childhood experiences.

It was agreed that empowering young people to say what they need was a valuable first step and that the care ambassadors should return to update the Panel on progress next year.

20. **CHILDREN IN CARE PLEDGE**

The Panel considered the report of the Director of Children's Services (Item 6 in the Minute Book) on progress against the children in care "Pledge".

The Panel was shown copies of the current Pledge and the following points were raised on each area:

- Extra Tuition. It was confirmed that extra funding had been made available and that schools had designated teachers to assist with the particular requirements of children in care. It was noted that there was still mixed awareness amongst school governors.
- Individual Budgets. Work was carried out with partners to raise awareness of activities available, although there were still transportation problems restricting access.
- Care Council. This was progressing and a paper was being prepared on next steps.
- Consistent Adult. This was now being provided through the care teams.
- Placement Choice. It was confirmed that children in care could now remain with their carer post 18, via the "staying put" scheme. It was

noted that there were increases in the numbers of carers, but also in demand and that there was still work to do on emergency placements.

- Peer Mentors. It was reported that these were working well in providing role models to children in care.

The next steps were discussed and it was explained to the Panel that a new pledge would be drawn up to respond to current challenges. It was noted that the pledge would be designed by young people to meet their needs, however it was agreed that the importance of educational aspirations was a central topic and that appropriate presentation to different age groups should be considered.

It was resolved that the Panel note the progress made to date and support the development of a revised Pledge for our Children in Care for discussion and agreement at a future meeting of the Panel.

21. HAMPSHIRE ADOPTION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

The Panel considered the report of the Director of Children's Services' (Item 7 in the Minute Book) Adoption Services end of year report for 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010.

It was explained that the majority of adopted children have been through the care system and many have complex requirements. It was noted that there were steady levels of adoptions and that a lot of work was carried out to help potential adopters to understand the requirements of the children they wished to adopt.

The timescales of the process were discussed and it was reported that there was some frustration, but that briefings have helped those involved to understand what needs to be done.

It was noted that reporting was carried out half yearly and it was agreed that each half year report should be discussed by the Panel at the next scheduled meeting.

It was resolved that the Panel approve the Hampshire Adoption Service Annual Report

22. PERFORMANCE UPDATE

The Panel considered the report of the Director of Children's Services (Item 8 in the Minute Book) providing an overview of performance against key indicators for safeguarding and children in care as at April 2010.

National issues that have had an effect on performance were highlighted. In particular: the "Baby P" case had led to increasing risk aversion and the recession was increasing the strain on families, both

of which had increased the rate of identifying children at risk and therefore the number of cases.

Performance improvements in reducing the number of children on a repeat child protection plan and reducing the number of children moving placements were pointed out to the Panel. It was noted that the numbers moving placements were still artificially high due to rules on the number of days a child can spend in respite care.

Concern was expressed regarding poor performance on NI 59 (initial assessments carried out within seven working days) and it was explained that the government have now changed this target to be 10 days as this is viewed as being more realistic. It was also emphasised that there is a fine balance of carrying out an assessment that is correct, good and quick.

23. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Members discussed the business coming forward for future meetings of the Panel including a response to the social work taskforce and reports on visits to Children's Homes.