

Notes of Joint Children and Young People and Health & Adult Social Care Task and Finish Group – A Focus on Reducing Teenage Conception Rates in the City

24 November 2009

Attendees: Councillor Purnell (Chair)
Councillor Aspinall (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Delbridge, Mrs Stephens and Mrs Watkins

1. There were no declarations of interest.
2. Questionnaires

It was reported that only one questionnaire had been returned and that witnesses were unable to attend the meeting.

It was commented by the group that it was clear that –

- (i) the lead officer had not been made aware of the extent of the role;
- (ii) the panel had relied on the support of the Democratic Support Officer but due to resource issues within democratic services led to a lack of continuity.

It was resolved that –

- (1) a date to be identified for the group to see witnesses and consider their information and come to recommendations;
- (2) the date should be in January to allow sufficient time for witnesses to be called.

3. Witness

Councillor Beer was asked to act as a witness in her role as sexual health champion. It was reported that –

- (i) the Councillor had met with young people across the city and had concluded that the number of teenage pregnancies was down to young peoples aspirations, young girls with no job or education prospects saw having a baby as something to care for and give meaning to their lives;
- (ii) there were areas in the youth provision across the city where young people were able to talk about sex;
- (iii) young fathers should also be considered, the Councillor has met many young fathers who had been affected by teenage pregnancy;
- (iv) the mother and baby unit was an impressive facility although there is still a long way to go in this area;

In response to questions to Councillor Beer it was reported that –

- (i) sex education in schools starts at around 13 years old which is too late for many children. Councillor Beer was of the opinion that more work had to be done earlier to look at the importance of relationships and providing clear examples of what is right and wrong;
- (ii) young fathers do what to play a bigger role in pregnancies and it is not the case that all young fathers are no longer around. Councillor Beer found that it is often young mothers that pull the plug on the relationship;
- (iii) deprivation is a factor in determining what level of support families can provide to young mothers. For example in Plympton and Plymstock family support is very good, less so in areas such as Honicknowle;
- (iv) many young mothers are glad to get back into education or training and it is those that are slipping through the net that should be focused on.

4. Summary and review

Following Councillor Beer's evidence it was further comments from the group included that –

- (i) the issues around boys and young men has not been adequately addresses and needs to have a focus;
- (ii) there was strong evidence that in deprived areas there are clusters of teenage pregnancies often groups of friends. There isn't sufficient evidence to support this in more affluent areas of the city;
- (iii) pregnant teenagers come from one or more of the following groups, those under the influence of drugs or alcohol, the vulnerable and those with low or no aspirations;
- (iv) teenage pregnancies can be seen as route to a positive experience in loving warming relationships;
- (v) around the edges of this review there were issues around the aspirations of young people in the city;
- (vi) consultation with young people on the draft report must take place, perhaps consider a one off event;
- (vii) the Panel present the partnership board with recommendations and that they respond as any government would;
- (viii) there is evidence of pockets of best practice across the city.