

Children and Young People – Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting – 11 November 2010

Report on proposal to transform the Plymouth Hospital and Outreach School

The Plymouth Hospital and Outreach School has five different sites. It caters for pupils with medical, physical, psychological and emotional needs. Most pupils come from the city of Plymouth, although one of the sites caters for young people from the whole of the south-west peninsula. The large majority of pupils are of secondary school age with some pupils having a statement of special educational needs. Depending on the nature of the pupils' particular needs, a placement may be short-term or pupils may attend the school for a considerable amount of time. The Hospital School also manages the home tuition service for some pupils who are unable to attend school for medical reasons.

Plymouth City Council, in collaboration with the governing body of the Plymouth Hospital and Outreach School, proposes to discontinue the Plymouth Hospital and Outreach School with effect from 28 March 2011. If agreed, the School would be replaced by a support service managed as part of the new Alternative Complementary Education (ACE) Service.

In order for this change to take place Plymouth City Council is consulting with all interested parties and anyone with an interest may complete the on-line form at www.plymouth.gov.uk/hospitalschool. The consultation started on Monday 4 October and closes on Monday 22 November 2010. The Council will then consider all the responses received and decide whether to move to the next stage – to issue a public notice in January 2011 proposing the closure of the School. If the Council publishes the Notice, this will allow a further six weeks for anyone to submit a formal objection to any of the proposals. After the Notice expires, the Council would consider all the responses received and in March 2011 decide finally whether to implement the closure.

Should this proposal be approved the School would be closed on 28 March 2011 and the support service opened on 29 March 2011. This would mean that all current staff contracts would terminate on the day the School closed and new staffing arrangements would normally come into effect on the day the support service opened. All staff initially would be transferred to the new support service and a new staffing structure will be set up to take effect from 1 September 2011.

The Council's foremost concern and first priority will be to ensure as far as possible that the education of the School's students is not disrupted. The local authority would work with governors to put together a transition plan to manage the transfer from school to support service designation should this proposal be approved and all pupils attending the School would be transferred to the new provision. The proposal for the new service is focused on attainment and continued improvement.

The proposal came about following the schools last Ofsted in March 2010 when they were issued with a notice to improve. The improvement plan prepared by the School and the governors in conjunction with the local authority addresses areas of action in the report and includes a proposal to change the School to part of the Alternative Complementary Education Service (ACE) providing short stay provision for pupils to complement existing maintained provision for challenging and vulnerable children. The action plan, which has been accepted by Ofsted, covers the period to January 2011 and outlines clear milestones for action.

Ofsted are expected to re-visit the School during the autumn to check progress on the action plan and we anticipate that clear progress will be identified. However, if the School is unable to show evidence of improvement this would trigger additional actions on the part of Ofsted and the local authority. For example Ofsted can make a decision to close the School if it feels that the School is unable to address the actions in the plan within the required timescales (normally 12 months from inspection) and is not on a clear trajectory to improvement at the six month period.

The ACE Service, which replaced the Plymouth Tuition Service in September 2010, is a holistic approach to service provision that has at its heart the need to ensure that the five outcomes of the Every Child Matters agenda are delivered to the City's most vulnerable children and young people. ACE will be a pivotal part of the new locality partnerships of targeted and specialist services for children, young people and their parents. The team will work within the multi-agency locality teams to ensure improved outcomes are achieved by vulnerable children and young people to ensure they achieve and/or exceed their hopes for the future. We believe that this proposal is in the best interests of children, families and staff at the School.

To date three responses have been received to the consultation, two in support and one against. In addition council officers held a drop-in session at the School's Greenfields site, which was attended by around 20 staff, governors and parents asking questions about the proposals.

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