

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

12 July 2012



Corporate Parenting Group Update

Context

Looking after other people's children is one of the most important things that councils do. It is the responsibility of all councillors, not just the lead member for children's services and officers.

Corporate parenting should not just be about making sure the right boxes are ticked to fulfil a statutory duty. Children and Young People in care are some of the most vulnerable people in society and often do not have the benefit of strong support networks others have through family and friends. Whilst this cannot be replicated in full, we should fulfil a similar role as far as possible by building relationships and making our parenting more human than corporate.

The Corporate Parenting Group therefore oversees the responsibilities of members and staff for raising the achievements and aspirations of, and providing opportunities to, all children in care in Plymouth.

The Corporate Parenting group receives reports from officers on various aspects of the social care service to children in care and makes decisions in support of appropriate service developments.

Update

At the last meeting on the 20 June 2012, the Corporate Parenting Group gave approval that planning should commence for next year's annual "You Can do it Too" awards events that celebrate the achievements of Plymouth's children and young people in care. It is hoped that early planning will result in more sponsorship being obtained to help offset the £10k cost of these events. Routeways the current 3rd sector provider of the children in care participation contract that supports the children in care council and young people's involvement in the Corporate Parenting Group will undertake the planning.

The Corporate parenting group have been actively involved in refreshing the "Pledge" that represents Plymouth's commitment to children and young people in care. The document now 3 years old has been updated in child friendly language and has taken into account the views of children and young people, members, foster carers and social workers. This is now ready for final consultation and sign off.

The number of children and young people in care in Plymouth has remained relatively stable at around 390 over the last 3 months despite a national upward trend. Over the previous year the numbers of children in care has risen by approximately 3% against a comparator group average of 6%. The reason for the increase appears to be linked to both improved public and professional recognition and reporting and also recognition of the corrosive lifelong effects of physical and emotional neglect of young children. Plymouth remains in a good place to respond to issues before they become problems because of the support of members in ensuring we have strong early intervention and prevention strategies.

A report was provided on the progress of the in house Parent and Child assessment scheme that was funded via the invest to save initiative. The project offers foster placements for infants up to three years old and their parents who are either subject to or on the cusp of care proceedings. Short term assessments are undertaken of these vulnerable parents ability to provide safe, good enough parenting. The project is “arm’s length” from the main body of children’s social care and as such aims to provide internal yet independent assessments for the Court. The service is gaining credibility with the Judiciary in providing quality comprehensive assessments and is resulting in less high cost independent sector placements being ordered. Good partnership relationships have been developed internally and externally have been developed to enhance the assessment and continuity processes e.g. housing, learning disability, children’s centres etc. A key priority for the service is to recruit additional foster carers to further build the service and to meet the invest to save targets.

Currently 18 children in care are placed in independent sector residential placements because of their challenging and complex needs. A significant number of these children are only placed out of City because there is no local resource. We have just completed a soft market test with residential providers to examine the potential for high quality residential provision being opened within the City in order that children can remain in their own communities and maintain their education and support service provision. We have identified one provider who is keen to work with us to provide 2 – 2 bedded units that will offer both good quality placements and very cost effective provision.

Corporate parents are very keen to see the development of a young people led training programme for members and senior officers regarding their corporate parenting responsibilities along the lines of a very successful programme developed in Bristol. Routeways have been tasked to take this forward.

David Simpkins

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