

## **CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **Minutes of the meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 29<sup>th</sup> February 2012 at 6.00 p.m. in the Scrutiny Meeting Room, Civic Offices, Telford**

**PRESENT:** Councillors G. Green (Chair), S. Burrell, J. Greenaway, M. Ion, J. Loveridge, A. Mackenzie and C. Turley  
S. Ali, A. Atkinson, S. Harris and E. Ofori (Co-optees)

**Also Present:** J. Collins (Assistant Director: Education, Culture & Skills), C. Jones (Assistant Director: Family & Cohesion Services), K. Kalinowski (Assistant Director: Care & Support), K. Perry (Interim Assistant Director: Children's Safeguarding), R. Smith (Service Delivery Manager: Access & Enablement), L. Higgins (Benefit Service Delivery Manager), C. de Poix (Participation Worker for Children in Care), G. Rawlings (Education Officer: Inclusion & School Improvement), N. White (Housing Manager), A. Yapp (Service Delivery Manager - Placements), T. Clarke (Scrutiny Officer), P. Smith (Democratic Services Team Leader).

#### **CYPSC-31 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

**RESOLVED** – that the minutes of the meetings held on 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> December 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

#### **CYPSC-32 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

M. Ward (Co-optee)

#### **CYPSC-33 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

#### **CYPSC-34 ISSUES ARISING FROM THE MEETING WITH THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE**

The Chair reported on the meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2012 with some of the young people in care. This was to talk with them about the Pledge in the Corporate Parenting Strategy in relation to 'Becoming Independent'. Notes of the meeting were attached to the agenda.

The Committee discussed some of the main issues that had been brought up by the young people, and what improvements could be made in the support given to young people as they prepared to leave care. These included:

- Arrangements for those young people who had left care to meet informally every now and then as a support network to each other;

- Having a peer mentoring scheme that would provide the young people with a role model who could provide practical advice and guidance;
- Providing some training and help with developing practical life-skills – maybe with the help of tradespersons;
- Using an example of a good relationship between a young person in care and their designated teacher to demonstrate the positive role teachers can play in providing support and advice;
- Making sure that all information provided to the young people is up-to-date, practical and user-friendly;

Two major issues that young people leaving care would face in the near future were:

- (i) Changes to the Benefit System – the Benefits Service Delivery Manager advised the Committee of Government policy to cut/cap housing benefit payments, and the proposals to merge all current benefits into a national universal welfare benefit. This would be centrally administered, with main access to the system for clients being on-line to the web, rather than the current localised service provided by the Council. Under the new system, claimants would receive directly a single payment to cover all their assessed needs – this would include an element for housing accommodation/rent.
- (ii) Lack of one-bed rented accommodation – the Housing Manager reported that the changes in benefit arrangements seemed to be pushing the U-35 age group towards sharing rented accommodation. Locally, Wrekin Housing Trust now had a policy to dispose of all their one bedroom accommodation.

Officers reported on the support and advice that was currently available to help young people in care become independent. This included assistance with purchase of furniture and white goods, a planned summer project on developing practical life skills, training and support for foster parents in helping the young people in the transition to independence, and support for 16-18 year olds in temporary accommodation. It was also recognised that work on becoming independent needed to start much earlier. The Assistant Director: Care & Support advised that all the information provided to young people in transition had just started to be reviewed, and this would be in consultation with the young people themselves, the Care Leaders Forum etc.

### **RESOLVED -**

- (a) That children in care should be a priority in terms of getting the best support, guidance and advice to be able to manage the transition to independence, and that measures should be in place to ensure the Council tracks its looked-after children to make sure they are receiving this support;**
- (b) That a key priority should be ensuring the young people are given the right skills to be able to make good choices;**

- (c) That Mr A Atkinson (Co-optee) join the group reviewing the information provided to young people in transition;
- (d) That an update from the Care Council be received at a future meeting;
- (e) That the impact of the changes to the benefit system, and effect on the types of rented accommodation available, be kept under review by the Committee.

### **CYPSC-35 THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE**

The Assistant Director: Education, Culture & Skills presented a report which provided answers to issues that had been raised by the Committee in relation to the education of children and young people in care.

In terms of local authority support, Damian Madine had been confirmed in the post of Looked-After Children specialist, and Gill Rawlings would be taking forward the approach for raising attainment among young people in care. The network of designated teachers was working well in providing support. Gill Rawlings advised that she would like to present attainment in a different way, so there was more detail and context on the particular circumstances and background for each child.

In relation to the Personal Education Plans (PEPs) for CiCs, it was felt from talking to the young people that they did not make any connection between their PEP and pathways to further or post 18 education. There also appeared to be variations in the effectiveness of the PEP. In response, the need for more consistency was accepted. Key to this was training for all those who inputted to the Plan – designated teachers, social workers and foster parents etc. Targets in the Plans also needed to be more specific.

In relation to monitoring by the local authority to ensure CiC pupils were being adequately challenged and supported academically, the Assistant Director reported that in primary schools, standards of attainment were rigorously externally monitored and evaluated by the Council's School Improvement Advisors on their regular visits to the schools. This was as a result of the vast majority of primary schools buying-in to the Council's educational support services. However, there was less buy-in among secondary schools, and the level of monitoring would depend on what direct links or buy-in the individual school had to the Authority.

#### **RESOLVED –**

- (a) that the potential “gaps” in the monitoring of the progress of looked after children in secondary schools was unsatisfactory, and that the Committee look further at how this could be addressed;
- (b) that the Committee receive more current (ie termly) data to show how CiC are doing in school, and that comparative data also be provided showing the performance of Telford & Wrekin CiC against their counterparts in other authorities;

- (c) that the Committee be provided at the next meeting with more detailed figures on the numbers of CiC subject to a Statement of Educational Need, and whether there was a correlation to those young people in out-of-Borough placements.

### **CYPSC-36 CONSULTATION ON JIGSAW SCHOOL**

The Assistant Directors: Family & Cohesion Services and Education, Culture & Skills presented a report that had been considered by Cabinet on 23 February 2012 concerning proposals for the reconfiguration of education provision at Jigsaw School, Hadley following a recent review of the current service delivery arrangements.

Jigsaw was part of the Hadley Learning Community, and provided a school unit for 30 pupils in key stages 3 and 4 with significant and complex behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD), with four purpose built 4 bed children's homes adjacent to the school. Current special needs educational provision, including Jigsaw, did not meet present needs, leading to a number of high cost external placements. An analysis of need had concluded that the biggest individual cohort of children and young people were those who fell into the Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and BESD category – 41 in 2011/12. It was therefore proposed in the longer term to create an ASD/BESD specialist school provision at Jigsaw School. However, to allow time for the new arrangements to be implemented at Jigsaw, it was proposed that the existing school be annexed to the Hadley Learning Community (HLC) with leadership being provided by a Vice Principal Jigsaw working to the Principal at HLC with effect from September 2012. Preliminary discussions had taken place with the school and it was anticipated that these arrangements would be confirmed during the consultation phase. The contract with the current providers of education at Jigsaw School was due to end in July 2012, and benchmarking work suggested the contract no longer represented value for money. Therefore, as part of the transitional arrangements, staff at Jigsaw would TUPE transfer to HLC with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012.

Options were also being considered for using the 4 houses on the Jigsaw site, following further consultation and taking into account the needs and wishes of the current residents. The report before Members also set out the proposed consultation (including a 6 week statutory consultation) work that would be undertaken with service users, partners and stakeholders. Any final proposals for reconfiguration would need to be approved by the Department for Education.

Members asked a number of questions, including

#### **What were the anticipated savings that would result from these proposals?**

By increasing the capacity at Jigsaw, there would be savings from reducing the number of out-of-Borough placements. It was also projected that a saving of up to £200,000 per year could be made against the current contract arrangements. It was also possible that any spare places at the new facility could be used to bring in income.

#### **What was the risk that the interim arrangements might have an adverse impact on Hadley Learning Community in terms of their capacity and governance?**

A risk assessment had been carried out. It was not possible to say there would be no impact, and the full implications would be explained to the Governing Body. However, it was felt that there was the management capacity at HLC to support this, with leadership being provided by a Vice Principal - Jigsaw working to the Principal at HLC.

**RESOLVED –**

- (a) that the report be noted;
- (b) that further information and feedback be presented to the Committee at the end of the consultation process in late April/early May 2012.

**CYPSC-37 PERFORMANCE MONITORING INFORMATION**

The Committee received a report setting out the standard monitoring information for children in care, as at 31 January 2012.

**RESOLVED -** that the report be noted.

**CYPSC-38 FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee received their latest Forward Plan for 2011/12. The Chair reported that it would be useful for the Committee to receive information and feedback on the latest phase of consultation on the BSF secondary school re-organisation either at the March or April meetings.

**RESOLVED -** that the BSF secondary school re-organisation be added as an agenda item for the March or April meetings.

The meeting ended at 7.52 pm.

**Chairman:** .....

**Date:** .....