

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Report

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| Committee/Panel: | Corporate Parenting Board |
| Date: | 3 December 2018 |
| Title: | Bright Spots Survey of Children in Care |
| Report From: | Director of Children's Services |

Contact name: Jane Stevens

Tel: 01420 546835

Email: jane.stevens@hants.gov.uk

1. Recommendation

1.1. That the Corporate Parenting Board note the content of this report.

2. Summary

2.1. The purpose of this paper is to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with an overview of the Bright Spots Survey 2018 which was undertaken with 378 children and young people from Hampshire County Council's care population of 1304, a response rate of 29%. This is a reduction in the response rate of last year by 8% with the view that children and young people are more likely to engage if the survey to be completed less frequently. The risk of continuing annually is that fewer children and young people will want to complete this year on year and the value of the findings is reduced.

2.2. The survey was distributed through the Independent Reviewing Service. Independent Reviewing Officers were asked to support children and young people to complete the survey. Regular reminders and updates on response rates were sent to the IRO team during the survey period. Most children and young people were asked to complete the online survey together with their IRO ahead of their LAC review meeting over a six-month period from October 2017- March 2018.

3. Contextual information

3.1. This research is part of the Bright Spots programme: a partnership between the University of Bristol and Coram Voice.

The programme aims to:

- improve the care experience for all looked after children;
- give children a voice on their own well-being; and
- highlight the 'Bright Spots' of practice that contribute to children flourishing in care.

3.2. The *Bright Spots Well-Being Indicators*, places children's experience and voices at the heart of measuring subjective well-being. The indicators are measured by the '*Your Life, Your Care*' survey—a tool grounded in research and comparable to national data sets. The survey identifies the areas where children appear to be flourishing and where things could be improved, providing an evidence base of children's experience and well-being to inform service improvements.

3.3. Three online surveys were used to capture looked after children and young people's views on their own well-being. The three versions were for:

- Children aged 4-7yrs (16 questions);
- Children aged 8-11yrs in primary school (31 questions); and
- Young people of secondary school age 11-18yrs (46 questions).

There was a common set of 16 core questions.

Paper surveys were also available and used in cases where no Internet was available, or when the child preferred this method.

3.4. In Hampshire at the time of the survey 1,304 children and young people aged 4-18yrs were looked after and able to complete the survey. Children and young people completed the survey anonymously: individual identifiers such as name, school etc. were not collected in order to allow responses without fear of consequences. If children recorded names or any identifying information on the survey these were removed by the researchers.

3.5. Subjective well-being in this survey refers to children's own evaluations of how they feel about their lives. There are questions in the surveys about affect (e.g. how happy a child feels now), cognitive judgements (e.g. evaluations of relationships) and the inner world (e.g. life having meaning). All these elements help gain an understanding of whether children are flourishing. In addition to questions that measure overarching well-being indicators (happiness, life satisfaction etc.) the questions cover four domains that are important to children and young people: Relationships, Resilience, Rights and Recovery.

3.6. A total of 378 children and young people completed the surveys from an eligible looked after population of 1,304. The overall response rate was 29% which compared to last year when the response rate was 37%, 2018 saw a decrease in responses. The largest decline was seen in responses from the youngest children who had a response rate of 45% in 2016/17.

| Age | Care Population | Responses | Response Rate |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------|---------------|
| 4 – 7 years | 231 | 42 | 18% |
| 8 – 11 years | 238 | 75 | 32% |
| 11 – 18 years | 835 | 261 | 31% |

3.7. In Hampshire, 56% of the looked after population were boys in Hampshire’s statistical return to the DfE (2017). There were more boys (55%) who completed the survey than girls (44%), which reflected the local looked after population. There was a higher response rate for boys (64%) in the 8-11yrs survey compared with the other age groups and the local looked after population. Five young people preferred to not report their gender.

| Age | Girls | Boys | Prefer not to say/no reply |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|----------------------------|
| 4 – 7 years | 19 (45%) | 23 (55%) | - |
| 8 – 11 years | 27 (36%) | 48 (64%) | - |
| 11 – 18 years | 121 (46%) | 135 (52%) | 5 (2%) |

3.8. The majority (80%) of children and young people who completed the survey were white. Children who identified themselves as being of mixed ethnicity (10%) were over-represented in the survey compared with the local care population, where 4% were recorded as ‘mixed’. (DfE, 2017)

3.9. The majority (70%) of children and young people were living in foster care. Seven young people who reported they were living ‘somewhere else’ were staying in supported accommodation.

4. Performance - Bright Spots!

4.1. In Hampshire, children and young people reported that they felt safe and settled in their homes. 89% of 8-11yrs felt settled ‘all or most of the time’, which was a significantly bigger proportion when compared to 16 other LAs.

4.2. 92% of children (8-11yrs) and 88% of young people (11-18yrs) were given opportunities to explore the outdoors. For the older group this is a significantly bigger proportion compared to their peers in 16 other LAs.

4.3. 70% of young people talked regularly with their carers about things that mattered to them. This was a larger proportion compared to their peers in the general population, where 66% talked regularly to a parent.

4.4. 100% of young children (4-7yrs), 99% of children (8-11yrs) and 93% of young people (11-18yrs) thought the adults they lived with noticed how they were feeling 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'. In comparison to their peers across 16 LAs, a significantly larger proportion of the youngest children (4-7yrs) thought their carers noticed their feelings.

4.5. Children and young people in Hampshire reported positive relationships with their carers. The majority of children and young people trusted their carers and thought their carers showed an interest in their education.

4.6. The majority of children (4-7yrs: 93%, 8-11yrs: 95%) and young people (88%) who knew their social worker trusted them 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'.

5. What the Children & Young People wish for:

5.1. Fewer changes of social worker:

The introduction of the Children's Assessment and Safeguarding teams was designed to reduce the number of changes of social worker a child or young person may experience however, these teams were only just being rolled out across the county when this survey was undertaken so the impact for children and young people looked after is yet to be measured.

Additionally the numbers of agency social workers will reduce as the GETs workers come on line resulting in less use of a transient locum workforce and more stability for children in care. The increase in the number of permanent social workers and decrease in the agency staff should have a positive impact as children and young people are more likely to be able to develop a trusting relationship with their social worker where they experience consistency of their allocated worker.

Whilst the department has developed measures to increase staffing levels and retain existing staff, there will always be a level of turn over due to promotion, or staff moving away etc therefore, although we cannot eradicate children in care experiencing a change of social worker every effort is made to maintain stability of worker for the child.

5.2. More family contact or, less family contact:

Family contact arrangements were an area where children and young people expressed some dissatisfaction and, whilst many expressed they wished to see more of their family enough others stated they did not want to see family at all. Some children, especially in the younger age range felt that they did not understand why they were not able to see their family whenever they wanted to.

Contact arrangements are given very careful consideration and have to take in a number of factors including the practical arrangements, the relationship with the family member and of course any safeguarding issues. Whilst the child may wish to have daily contact with their mum it may be impractical and unsafe to do so. The contact arrangements for every child in care are re-considered at every child looked after statutory review, held at least twice a year and, depending upon the individual's needs and circumstances could be increased, especially where reunification is being assessed. Alternatively this could be reduced if the existing contact arrangements are not meeting the child's needs, for example the parent regularly does not turn up which will be harmful to the child. Whether the contact arrangements change or not, the safety and wellbeing of the child is paramount however, does not prevent the child or young person 'wishing' for more, or less, contact.

What is important is whether the child is provided, at an age appropriate level, with an understanding of why they may not have as much contact with family members as they wish however, this would still not necessarily result in a change to their wishes.

5.3. No trusted adult identified:

Independent visitors can be sourced where it is identified that a child or young person in care has no trusted adult or no contact with family members. Hampshire Children's Services are currently recruiting Volunteer Independent Visitors to specifically work with our children and young people in care to ensure they have an adult they can trust.

5.4. Less bullying and more friends:

There has been an increase in the number of schools and the number of 'new arrivals ambassadors' (peer mentoring) trained and using the scheme to support children looked after particularly where they are new to the school. The target for 2018/19 has already been exceeded. Hampshire & Isle of Wight Educational Psychology team are working to increase participation and involvement in the County's annual anti-bullying campaign which is promoted through Schools comms.

5.5. A clearer understanding of their journey into care:

Life Story work with children in care has been regularly raised in the County Children in Care Team Managers meeting. Following feedback that there was a waiting list for training in this area, the Workforce Development Team agreed to provide an additional training event to ensure that our workforce have the necessary skills to undertake this area of work.

The hybrid devices enable social workers to access a variety of tools to aid direct work whilst visiting children and young people. Identifying appropriate resources

is crucial in aiding a child to understand their journey, however this needs to be age appropriate and sensitive to the issues involved, many of which will be regarding inappropriate adult behaviour by their parents. This area of work is not a 'one off' event, as the child grows up their knowledge and understanding needs to grow with them to enable them to make sense of their world and appropriate choices in the future, such as whether to choose to return home when they are older or whether to make the same lifestyle choices as their parents.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1. This has been the second consecutive Bright Spots survey of children and young people in the care of Hampshire County Council. With only 29% of our looked after children and young people taking part this is lower than the previous year by 8%. Children and young people have reportedly demonstrated less interest in participating in this survey with the view that undertaking this survey bi-annually may increase the number of children and young people completing the survey thereby increasing the validity of the data.
- 6.2. The survey is based on children and young people's feelings and emotions and provides little or no context around the responses. In some areas, children's comments have been added and this can provide context, therefore where a child reports feeling 'sad', we are left trying to understand the cause and what we might need or be able to do about this. When a child adds a comment "my grandfather died", we can understand that this is a 'normal' emotion under the circumstance and other than ensuring a child is appropriately support, we cannot change the cause of the sadness.
- 6.3. What the survey does however is to provide a window in to the world of some of the children and young people in care in Hampshire. This assists Children's Services to identify areas we can realistically develop and, separate out the external factors which are beyond our control.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**Links to the Strategic Plan**

| | |
|--|--------|
| Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity: | yes/no |
| People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives: | yes/no |
| People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment: | yes/no |
| People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities: | yes/no |
| OR | |
| This proposal does not link to the Strategic Plan but, nevertheless, requires a decision because: | |

Other Significant Links

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|--|-------------|
| Links to previous Member decisions: | |
| <u>Title</u> | <u>Date</u> |
| | |
| Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives | |
| <u>Title</u> | <u>Date</u> |
| | |

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

DocumentLocation

None

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equality Duty

1.1. The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- a) The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- b) Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- c) Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

1.2. **Equalities Impact Assessment:** Not completed.

7. Impact on Crime and Disorder: No impact.

8. Climate Change:

8.1.1. How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption? No impact.

8.1.2. How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts? No impact.