

AT A MEETING of the Children and Families Advisory Panel of HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL held at the castle, Winchester on Tuesday, 12th October, 2021

Chairman:
p Councillor Arun Mummalaneni

p Councillor Ann Briggs
p Councillor Nick Adams-King
a Councillor Prad Bains
Councillor Christopher Donnelly

p Councillor Juliet Henderson
Councillor Wayne Irish
p Councillor Adam Jackman
a Councillor Malcolm Wade

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Prad Bains and Malcolm Wade. Councillor Tim Groves was in attendance as the Liberal Democrat Deputy Member.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were mindful that where they believed they had a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any matter considered at the meeting they must declare that interest at the time of the relevant debate and, having regard to the circumstances described in Part 3, Paragraph 1.5 of the County Council's Members' Code of Conduct, leave the meeting while the matter was discussed, save for exercising any right to speak in accordance with Paragraph 1.6 of the Code. Furthermore Members were mindful that where they believed they had a Personal Interest in a matter being considered at the meeting they considered whether such interest should be declared, and having regard to Part 5, Paragraph 5 of the Code, considered whether it was appropriate to leave the meeting whilst the matter was discussed, save for exercising any right to speak in accordance with the Code.

Councillor Nick Adams-King declared a Personal Interest as he is Chairman of an adoption panel.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

4. DEPUTATIONS

There were no deputations on this occasion.

5. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman welcomed Members to the first formal meeting of the Panel in the new administration. The Chairman also extended his thanks to those who were no longer Members of the Panel.

6. **INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE CARE PLAN AUDIT**

The Children and Families Advisory Panel received a presentation from the Director of Children's Services on Hampshire Children's Services Care Plan Audit 2020/21 (Item 6 in the Minute Book).

Members of the Panel were led through the presentation slides and it was heard that under regulations, there had to be an Independent Reviewing Service (IRS) which undertakes an annual audit of the quality of children's care plans. The audit focussed on the following areas: The Care Plan; The Personal Education Plan (PEP); The Health Assessment (HA); Needs of the Child; The Child Looked Review; Equality and Diversity.

The methodology of the audit was explained to Members, as well as the key findings. It was noted that areas for development included ensuring that care plans were signed by both the child and parents, following the looked after review. Members also heard that health appointments such as dental and optician had been affected during the national covid lockdown, and this area would be monitored and reported through monthly performance meetings.

In summarising, Members heard that the audit highlighted that the majority of looked after children in Hampshire felt safe, loved and were happy. There were some areas for development, and the IRS had plans in place to address these.

In response to questions, Members heard that;

- That work was being undertaken with virtual 'Heads' to ensure PEP'S are put in place as soon as possible.
- That currently the Regulations stipulate that all looked after children had to have a health assessment.

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Families Advisory Panel note the key findings and areas of development of the Independent Reviewing Service's Care Plan Audit.

7. **CHILDREN AND FAMILIES PARTICIPATION REPORT**

The Children and Families Advisory Panel received a report from the Director of Children's Services providing an overview and summary of participation activity within the Children and Families branch in 2020 (Item 7 in the Minute Book).

The report was introduced and it was explained that participation activities are designed to help build and strengthen relationships within families. Officers drew attention to the different kinds of activities as set out in paragraphs 10 – 26 of the report and activities such as 'We've Got Talent' and the 'Legends of Lockdown

Podcast' were highlighted. In concluding, Members noted that the Participation Strategy was being refreshed to provide a framework and direction for 2022-2025, and children and young people would be fully consulted on this as part of the participation work. Officers also encouraged Members of the Panel to visit local Children's Homes, as well as the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). These visits would need to be carefully managed, and Members were asked to register interest through the Democratic Services Officer. In response to a Member query, it was heard that there would be a blended approach to participation activities going forward, to incorporate virtual and in-person.

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Families Advisory Panel is aware of and notes the participation activity that has taken place.

8. ANNUAL FOSTERING REPORT

The Children and Families Advisory Panel received a report from the Director of Children's Services providing an annual update on fostering (Item 8 in the Minute Book). The report was introduced and key headlines were highlighted.

It was noted that Hampshire's Fostering Service had a target to provide 187 additional fostering placements by 31 March 2023, and the marketing strategy around this was explained. Officers presented further information around the recruitment of foster carers, and it was heard that because of the Covid pandemic, there had been more focus on targeted digital marketing, as well as an increase in on-line and virtual activity. The results of the annual Foster Carer Survey were highlighted, and it was heard that with the impact of Covid and virtual foster carer support, many foster carers missed having face to face support, which had resulted in a decrease in satisfaction in this area in 2020/21.

Officers also highlighted the work of the six Hampshire fostering panels and it was heard that some panel training would continue to be held virtually to continue the blended approach to training. Members heard that in relation to statistics within the Service for 2020/21, there had been 110 fostering households that had been de-registered during this period, and details relating to these were explained. It was also noted that there had been some delays with medicals during 2020/21 due to the pandemic.

In conclusion, Members heard that the Service continued to work closely with Hampshire Fostering Network, and whilst this had been a challenging year because of the pandemic, the Service had adapted quickly to provide additional support where needed.

In response to questions, Members heard that;

- That there is a wide range of training available to foster carers, and out of hours foster carers tend to be more experienced.
- That foster training is a very invasive process, and it is crucial to ensure prospective foster carers are aware of this early on.
- That there are sometimes delays in foster carer medicals, and it can be unclear when there is a delay, where in the process this is.

- That an area of focus is the recruitment of foster carers who are able to foster children with a disability.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report are noted by the Children and Families Advisory Panel.

9. MODERNISING PLACEMENTS PROGRAMME

The Children and Families Advisory Panel received a report and presentation from the Director of Children's Services on the Modernising Placements Programme (MPP) (Item 9 in the Minute Book).

Members of the Panel were taken through the slides and the objectives of the MPP were explained. It was noted that the aim of the programme was to develop a continuum of care which can provide the right accommodation and support at the right time for children in care in Hampshire. Officers also highlighted the Hampshire Hives, and it was heard that these provide support and respite for foster carers in the Hive. The achievements of the Hive were detailed at presentation slide 7.

Training for foster carers had also been reviewed and this would be kept under review to ensure training packages are kept up to date. Members also heard details about the importance of Trauma Informed Working and also the Urgent Care Service.

Members thanked officers for the report and presentation, and were keen to provide support to officers by communicating the work of the Service.

In response to questions, Members heard that;

- That foster carers need to be equipped with skills through training, to be able to look after children who have come into care suffering from trauma.
- That the Hives were important in building resilience and support amongst foster carers, which in turn should help prevent placement breakdowns.

RESOLVED:

- i) That the Children and Families Advisory Panel notes the progress of the programme.
- ii) The Children and Families Advisory Panel notes the work proposed to expand the wider understanding of shared partnerships, companies, businesses and communities of children in care and the foster carer role, and considers the contribution Councillors can make

Chairman, Children and Families
Advisory Panel