

## VOICE OF THE CHILD OVERVIEW PANEL

**Day:** Wednesday  
**Date:** 1 November 2017  
**Time:** 6.00 pm  
**Place:** Room 2 - Dukinfield Town Hall

Item No.	AGENDA	Page No
1.	<b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b>	
2.	<b>MINUTES</b>  To approve as a correct record, the Minutes of the proceedings of the Voice of the Child Overview Panel held on 13 September 2017.	1 - 2
3.	<b>OFSTED MONITORING VISIT</b>  The Panel to discuss findings from the letter published by Ofsted on 12 October 2017 from the most recent monitoring visit undertaken on 12 and 13 September 2017.	3 - 6
4.	<b>CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL</b>  The Chair to discuss findings from the meeting with the Children in Care Council which took place on 5 October 2017 and the planning of further enquiry.	
5.	<b>ACHIEVING BEST PRACTICE</b>  The Scrutiny and Member Services Manager to present a paper detailing best practice guidelines, to ensure the voice and lived experiences of young people are incorporated across all aspects of Children's Services.	7 - 8
6.	<b>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</b>  To note that the next meeting of the Voice of the Child Overview Panel will take place on Wednesday 13 December 2017.	
7.	<b>URGENT ITEMS</b>  To consider any additional items the Chair is of the opinion shall be dealt with as a matter of urgency.	

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From: Democratic Services Unit – any further information may be obtained from the reporting officer or from Paul Radcliffe, Scrutiny and Member Services Manager on 0161 342 2199 or by email [paul.radcliffe@tameside.gov.uk](mailto:paul.radcliffe@tameside.gov.uk) with apologies or requests for further information, to whom any apologies for absence should be notified.

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## Voice of the Child Overview Panel 13 September 2017

**Commenced:** 6.00pm

**Terminated:** 7.10pm

**Present:** Councillors T Smith (Chair), Sidebottom, M Smith, R Welsh

**Apologies for absence:** Councillors J Lane, Pearce, Peet

### 1. CHAIR'S WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed members to the first meeting of the Voice of the Child Overview Panel. It was discussed that the Panel will have responsibility to ensure that the voice and lived experience of children is reflected in the improvement activity. It is important that focus is placed on providing supportive and constructive checks to existing policies, procedures and partnership working.

### 2. TERMS OF REFERENCE

Members received a draft paper outlining the proposed Terms of Reference for the Panel.

**Resolved:** That the Terms of Reference is approved and adopted by the Panel.

### 3. UPDATE ON OFSTED INSPECTION AND MONITORING VISIT

The Panel received copies of the full Ofsted inspection report published on 9 December 2016; and the Ofsted letter from the monitoring visit which was undertaken on 8 and 9 June 2017. A summary of the Voice of the Child findings within the Ofsted report was also provided to draw particular attention to findings and recommendations within the report which will influence future work and enquiry of the Panel.

Members discussed the challenges that services now face in order to improve and the way by which improvements are both measured and monitored. With Ofsted identifying a number of areas in need of improvement relating to the voice of the child, the work of this panel will aim to ensure any failings are addressed in a way that significantly improves outcomes for all children who find themselves in touch with Children's Services.

The Chair also discussed the need for transparency in the way that service improvements and outcomes are relayed between Children Services, partner agencies and Elected Members to drive on-going improvement. This includes important messages such as improvement progress and achievements to continued challenges where a shared approach and responsibility may be needed.

**Resolved:** That close attention is placed on future Ofsted monitoring activity and the direction of the Panel's activity.

### 4. OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN

Members discussed how the Panel will look to engage directly with children, as well as looking at some of the processes for gathering, recording and learning from the voice and lived experiences of children and young people.

It was discussed how important the voice of the child can be when acting as a flag for a range of problems and potentially unidentified issues within a service. There is a need for an appropriate level of open and honest feedback systems, both for children to be heard and for staff to raise any concerns with managers and Elected Members.

A key part of the improvement journey is to ensure children are encouraged to be fully engaged by feeling comfortable, safe and confident to express their views on a range of procedures and decisions which will ultimately affect them in the short, medium and long-term.

## **5. WORK PROGRAMME**

The agreed area of work and future activity includes:

- For an initial meeting to be arranged with the Children in Care Council to learn more about the ways in which the voices and lived experiences of children are represented.
- To look at the wider engagement with children beyond children in care.
- To further explore best practice and professional guidelines.
- To map out how the voice of the child is heard in individual cases, how it is recorded, how it is acted upon and the ways by which collective learning and improvements are achieved.
- To explore how the voice of the child is collated across caseloads to draw out the learning points for wider service development.
- To benchmark with an area that is judged to be 'Good' by Ofsted with regards to the voice of the child.
- To review other sources of evidence that will improve the way that services review and act upon a range of findings and outcomes, e.g complaints.

### **Resolved:**

(1) For an informal meeting to be arranged before 1 November 2017, for members to meet with young people from the Children in Care Council.

(2) For details of the meeting with the Children in Care Council to be circulated to members by email and as a calendar invitation.

(3) For the Panel to receive a paper at the next meeting on 1 November 2017, with details of best practice and professional guidelines to ensure the voice and lived experiences of young people are incorporated within all aspects of Children's Services.

## **6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

To note that the next meeting of the Voice of the Child Overview Panel will take place on Wednesday 1 November 2017

## **7. URGENT ITEMS**

The Chair reported that there were no urgent items for consideration at this meeting.

**CHAIR**

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12 October 2017

Steven Pleasant MBE  
Dukinfield Town Hall  
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Dukinfield  
Tameside  
SK16 4LA

Dear Steven

## **Monitoring visit of Tameside Borough Council children's services**

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit undertaken on 12 and 13 September 2017. The visit was the third monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in December 2016. The inspectors were Paula Thomson-Jones HMI and Stella Elliott HMI.

The local authority has made some progress in the period since the last monitoring visit, but the pace of change is too slow.

### **Areas covered by the visit**

During the course of this visit, inspectors reviewed the progress made in respect of work with children who go missing and some aspects of work with children in care and care leavers. The visit considered a range of evidence, including electronic case records, supervision files and notes, and discussions with social workers, managers and senior leaders. This monitoring visit considered progress against four recommendations.

- Ensure that when children go missing from home or care, the information gathered at return home interviews is used to inform planning effectively and to reduce future risk.
- Ensure that all care leavers have an up-to-date and good-quality pathway plan that reflects their current needs and circumstances, and that they have full information about their entitlements to support them into adult life.
- Ensure that support to the Children in Care Council enables effective representation of the views of children of all ages and those placed at a distance from the local authority. This should include work to ensure that the pledge to children looked after and care leavers is refreshed and communicated effectively to all children and young people.

- Ensure that the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for care leavers aged 18 to 25 ceases.

In addition, inspectors visited the Public Service Hub to check whether progress seen during the monitoring visit in March 2017 has been maintained.

## **Overview**

There has been some progress in respect of all four recommendations since the inspection. Since the previous monitoring visit, priorities from the improvement plan have been translated into a '12-week plan'. Senior leaders are using this to track progress and performance in some key areas. This has not led to strong coordination of service improvement or consistent frontline practice. As a result, despite the hard work of staff and managers, the pace of change and improvement remains too slow.

## **Evaluation of progress**

The service offered to children and families at the Public Service Hub continues to be better than at the time of the inspection. The improvements seen at the monitoring visit in March 2017 have been maintained. An extra manager has ensured that oversight remains effective, even though there is more work coming into the Hub. Contact records seen at this visit show good consideration of history, appropriate information-gathering and sound analysis to inform decision-making for children. The recent increase in police and health professionals in the Hub is positive, but it is too early to see any improvement to the quality of service. The planned introduction of a written referral form for professionals has not taken place. This means that social care staff are still processing and recording verbal information in order to make decisions about children's needs.

Work with children who go missing has improved since the inspection. Staff at the Public Service Hub now manage notifications about all missing children. They have effective working relationships with partner agencies, which ensure better information-sharing. A multi-agency panel coordinates the response to all children who go missing, to agree the most appropriate way to help them. All children in Tameside are now referred to a commissioned service for a return home interview. As a result of these changes, there has been an increase in the numbers of children being seen and spoken to about the time they are missing.

The quality of the records for return home interviews has improved since the inspection. In all cases seen during this visit, records show a quick response to the missing episode and efforts made to locate and meet with young people. The information that is recorded from these interviews is helping the police find children more quickly if they go missing again. In some cases, information gathered from interviews has informed care planning and made a difference to the outcomes for children. This is not consistent, and for some children looked after the reasons they give for going missing are not responded to quickly enough. The commissioned service provides detailed and regular data about its work, yet the local authority is

still not able to report via its own recording system on children missing. This is a significant gap and means that the authority cannot compare numbers of children who go missing with numbers who have return home interviews. The authority is also unable to run its own reports on timeliness of this work. This is a significant weakness in the local authority's work.

The service provided to care leavers, which was judged to require improvement at the time of the inspection, has not made enough progress. There continues to be delay in completing and reviewing pathway plans. This is because there are no clear arrangements in place to transfer work to the leaving-care team. There is also confusion about who should complete the plans and at what time. As a result, planning is not taking place early enough for young people. In addition, many plans are not informed by an updated assessment. Plans do not always address the changing needs of young people or the impact of significant life events. The recent appointment of a team manager for the service is helping to improve pathway planning. The local authority reports that the number of young people with an up-to-date pathway plan has increased in the last three months from 74.9% to 78%.

The size of the leaving-care team has increased and caseloads are lower. Inspectors saw evidence of staff spending more time with young people and giving them good-quality support. This includes help to meet their emotional, accommodation and financial needs. A new housing worker is working to improve accommodation choices, and young people are able to register for housing earlier. Furthermore, the council recently agreed that care leavers will be exempt from council tax until they are 21. No young people have been placed in bed and breakfast accommodation for six months. However, the local authority does not have access to a good range of accommodation for care leavers, which means that provision is unlikely to meet future demands.

At the time of the inspection, the Children in Care Council, called 2BeUS, was a small group of young people who did not represent all ages. Over the last 12 months, the numbers of children involved in 2BeUS activity has increased, but the number who attend formal meetings continues to be very small. 2BeUS has designed leaflets, organised social activities and taken part in awareness-raising events for elected members. Young people talking to the council about how leaving-care grants are spent has resulted in a change of policy. The local authority is running a pilot that enables young people to buy goods from a wider range of shops. A refreshed pledge to children looked after was relaunched earlier in the year. It remains unclear how this is going to be delivered. The young people have some goals; for example, 2BeUs wants to have a website, but there is no clear plan or timescale to make this happen.

The local authority has continued to undertake audits of casework. Audits seen during this visit were still too focused on compliance rather than outcomes for children. Audit activity does result in themes for improvement, but this does not then translate into wider service planning. The local authority has recently had some peer

support to review its audit activity. It is using this to revise and relaunch its audit programme.

Since the last monitoring visit, there has been a reduction in staff turnover. This is providing greater staff stability and capacity to make further improvements to services. However, despite staff and managers understanding what needs to improve, the absence of a clear plan that supports improvement in practice continues to impede progress.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paula Thomson-Jones  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**



## The Voice of the Child – Approach

This paper provides information relating to the professional guidance for the ways by which local authority Children's Services will record and take account of the voice of children in order to achieve best practice.

The views of children and their families are essential to good practice in social care. The voice of children must be recorded and taken into account no matter of age or ability to communicate. This can be done through direct engagement, observation and through conversation with parents and family members.

### **Working Together to Safeguard Children (March 2015)**

The Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance is the overarching statutory guidance for all relevant professionals so that they can respond to children's needs appropriately. This includes Social Workers, professionals from Health Services, the Police and Education.

Local authorities have responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children and young people in their area. They have a number of statutory functions under the 1989 and 2004 Children Acts. Whilst local authorities play a lead role, safeguarding children and protecting them from harm can be viewed as everyone's responsibility.

The guidance includes a section 'Focusing on the needs and views of the child'. It states that every assessment should be child centred and where any conflict arises between the needs of the child and their parents/carers, any decisions should be made in the child's best interests. Every authority has to give due regard to a child's age and understanding when determining what services to provide.

Children should, wherever possible, be seen alone and children's social care has a duty to ascertain the child's best wishes and feelings regarding the provision of services to be delivered. It is important to observe the resilience of the individual child when planning appropriate services. Every assessment should draw together relevant information gathered from the child and their family; and from professionals including teachers, early years workers, health professionals and the Police.

A high quality assessment is one in which evidence is built and revised upon throughout the process. A Social Worker may arrive at a judgement early in a case but this may need to be revised as a case progresses and where further information comes to light. It is expected as part of the skilled profession that Social Workers will revisit their assumptions in light of new evidence and take necessary action to revise their decisions in the best interests of the individual child.

No system can fully eliminate risk. In order for assessments and decisions to be as robust as possible Social Work Managers should challenge the Social Worker's assumptions as part of this process. This should allow for an informed decision to be taken on the nature of any required action. Critical reflection through supervision should strengthen the analysis in each assessment, with Social Workers, their managers and other professionals always considering the plan from the child's perspective.

Within **one working day** of a referral being received, a local authority Social Worker should make a decision about the type of response that is required and acknowledge receipt to the referrer. The maximum timeframe for the assessment to conclude should be no longer than 45 working days from the point of referral. In some cases the needs of the child will mean that a quick assessment will be required.

For any children in need of immediate protection, action must be taken by the social worker as soon as possible after the referral has been made to the local authority.

## **Ofsted Framework and Evaluation – Experiences of children who need help and protection**

A local authority is likely to be judged as good if:

- Children and young people are listened to, practice is focused on their needs and experiences and influenced by their wishes and feelings or, where they cannot represent their views themselves, those advocated on their behalf. They are consistently seen and seen alone by social workers where statutory guidance requires that this should happen and it is professionally judged to be in the best interests of the child.
- Children, young people and families benefit from stable and meaningful relationships with social workers. They are engaged in all actions and decisions and understand the intentions of the help they receive. Where there are concerns about the safety and protection of children and parents do not engage, there is a full risk assessment and urgent involvement of a senior manager in all decisions about next steps.
- Decision-making is undertaken by suitably qualified and experienced social workers and managers, with decisions, all actions and engagement with the family and other professionals clearly recorded.
- Practice is informed by feedback from children and their families about the effectiveness of the help, care or support they receive from the time it is first needed until it ends.
- Children, young people and families have timely access to, and use the services of, an advocate where appropriate.

## **Tameside Children’s Social Care – Case File Audits**

The local approach to case file audits has changed. Past audits have focussed on the last 12 months of the case activity. It is accepted that within the constraints of a time limited audit, the auditor does not have ability to scrutinise the whole child’s journey.

As part of the new approach it is important that a meaningful way to monitor a child’s journey is created and to assess the impact of the decisions that have been made. The audit also includes a section for the auditor to speak to the child and parents/carers about the views on the service provided. Auditors are asked to sit for an hour with the social worker to look closely at the case file together, which now provides an opportunity for discussion and constructive challenge. The auditor then completes their report and reaches a judgement on the case using Ofsted’s classifications of Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement or Inadequate.

The auditor is asked to look at the quality of work undertaken and to put the child at the centre of the audit and to consider ‘what is the child’s journey?’.

Prior to the audit social workers will be asked to provide the following documents, which will be passed to each individual auditor:

- Initial referral/contact
- Most recent assessment
- Section 47 report or equivalent
- Most recent plan
- Most recent review
- Chronology of significant events