

Voice of the Child Overview Panel

1 November 2017

Commenced: 6.00pm

Terminated: 7.20pm

Present: Councillors T Smith (Chair), J Lane, Pearce, Peet, Sidebottom, M Smith

Apologies for absence: Councillor R Welsh

The Chair opened the minutes and received apologies.

8. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Voice of the Child Overview Panel held on 13 September 2017 were approved as a correct record.

9. OFSTED MONITORING VISIT

The Panel received copies of the Ofsted letter published on 12 October 2017, which provides a summary of findings from the monitoring visit undertaken on 12 and 13 September 2017. This was the third monitoring visit since services were judged inadequate in December 2016.

The visit reviewed aspects of work with children in care and progress was considered against four recommendations, which included support to the Children in Care Council to enable effective representation of the views of children of all ages and those placed at a distance from the local authority.

At the time of the inspection, the Children in Care Council (2BeUS), was a small group of young people who did not represent all ages. The monitoring visit identified that over the last 12 months, the numbers of children involved in 2BeUS activity has increased, however the numbers attending formal meetings continues to be very small. The young people have some goals to develop a website, with the need for a clear plan to be developed.

The Panel expressed concerns relating to the pace and effectiveness of improvements, with particular emphasis on the importance of achieving better outcomes for children. The Chair advised members of ways for the Panel to further develop its relationship with the Children in Care Council and options for further and more informal meetings to support the required improvements.

Resolved: That when published, the findings from future Ofsted monitoring visits are reported to the Panel.

10. CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL

The Chair discussed findings from a meeting with young people from the Children in Care Council (2BeUS) which took place on 5 October 2017. Members met with a small group of children at Active Medlock during a pre-arranged meeting.

The meeting was informal which allowed members to explain the work of the Panel and its intentions to learn about experiences first-hand, in order to improve outcomes. This also provided an environment for children to feel comfortable and able to express any views.

It was discussed that building effective and long lasting relationships with a Social Worker is of the utmost importance. It becomes more difficult for children if this becomes unstable and inconsistent. It was also mentioned that looked after children would benefit from alternative contacts if their Social Worker is unavailable, on holiday or support is required out of hours.

The Chair reported that the meeting highlighted that further work is needed in order for more looked after children to be involved in 2BeUS and to ensure goals and ambitions are achieved, such as the development of a website.

Resolved: That further options are explored to meet with young people from the Children in Care Council and to explore the support required to achieve required improvement.

11. ACHIEVING BEST PRACTICE

The Scrutiny and Member Services Manager presented a paper which detailed best practice guidelines to ensure the voice and lived experiences of young people are incorporated across all aspects of Children's Services.

The overarching statutory guidance for all relevant professionals is 'Working Together to Safeguard Children (March 2015)' and includes a section 'Focusing on the needs and views of the child'. It states that 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.

Every assessment should draw together relevant information gathered from the child and their family as well as other professionals where necessary; including teachers, early years workers, health professionals and the Police. The guidance acknowledges the presence of associated risks within this field and that no system can fully eliminate all risk. In order for assessments and decisions to be as robust as possible social work managers should challenge the assumptions of social worker as part of this process.

Ofsted framework and evaluation includes, 'Experiences of children who need help and protection'. A local authority is likely to be judged as 'Good' if there is clear evidence to suggest that children and young people are listened to and that practice is focused on their needs and influenced by their wishes and feelings.

A recurring theme across the guidance and framework is that practice should be informed by feedback from children; and that children 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.

The Panel expressed a need to meet with social workers directly to receive information relating to the way that certain aspects of the guidance is applied locally with particular attention to the way the voice of the children is recorded within all contacts and assessments. A number of questions were raised by members at the meeting which include:

- How effective and confident are Social Work Managers to identify required improvements to the way children are represented throughout contacts and assessments?
- What is the frequency and effectiveness of Social Worker supervisions to critically analyse the voice of the child?

Resolved: That arrangements are made for the Panel to meet with social workers prior to 13 December 2017.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Voice of the Child Overview Panel will take place on Wednesday 13 December 2017.

13. URGENT ITEMS

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

CHAIR