

Voice of the Child Overview Panel

13 December 2017

Commenced: 6.00pm

Terminated: 6.30pm

Present: Councillors T Smith (Chair), R Welsh

Apologies for absence: Councillors J Lane, Pearce, Peet, M Smith

The Chair opened the minutes and received apologies.

14. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Voice of the Child Overview Panel held on 1 November 2017 were approved as a correct record.

15. TERMS OF REFERENCE

Members noted a change to the Terms of Reference for the Panel, with detail to confirm that the Voice of the Child Overview Panel meet in public.

Resolved: That amendment to the Terms of Reference is noted by the Panel.

16. MEETING WITH SOCIAL WORKERS

The Chair discussed the recent meeting with Tameside Social Workers which took place on 30 November 2017. The meeting was arranged for members to receive first-hand information and examples of the approach taken and methods used to ensure the experiences and views of children are sought, recorded and used to inform future practice.

The group met with Social Workers from a range of services including the Hub, Duty and Safeguarding teams. Feedback was also sought from a Social Worker who predominantly works with children presenting a physical and/or cognitive disability.

The meeting proved extremely useful with information and practical examples shared on the methods used to seek and actively record the voice of the child, from initial contact and assessment to more complex and intense work aimed to ensure that the views of children form part of the way support is delivered. This also included the way experiences are captured with younger infants through play and the use of more innovative tools and methods to ensure the views of children with a learning disability are captured effectively.

Resolved: That a range of findings from the meeting are used to inform the Panel's future activity and identified actions.

17. CORPORATE PARENTS

The Policy Manager presented a paper which detailed statutory guidance and responsibilities of corporate parenting and wider regulation. With looked after children among the most vulnerable in our communities it is widely acknowledged that a collective response is needed in order to reduce gaps.

When a child enters the local authority care system, the tasks (including general safeguarding) which would ordinarily be the responsibility of their parents now becomes the responsibility of everyone at the Council and beyond. This encompasses many individuals and organisations such as officers of the Council, elected members, school staff and partner agencies.

Individuals and agencies have a responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare and wellbeing of children looked after and children leaving the care system. There is a legal and moral obligation to ensure the right conditions and supports are in place to allow them to thrive. This is a priority that reaches far beyond the staff working in Children's Services.

Legislation including the Children and Social Work Act 2017, provides a number of corporate parenting principles for local authorities in England. Part of the guidance includes the need to encourage and take account of the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people.

Members commented on the need to have clear understanding and awareness of the issues affecting children looked after and care leavers in the authority area, and those placed at a distance. With a further need to communicate with children through the appropriate channels and to constructively challenge opportunities and outcomes for children looked after.

Resolved: That the paper be noted and where necessary any findings of the Panel are shared with the Council's Corporate Parenting Group to take forward.

18. NEXT STEPS

The Chair confirmed that next step is for all recent activity and findings of the Panel to be reported in a way which details voice of the child issues identified within the Ofsted inspection and subsequent monitoring visits. The paper will need to conclude findings from all meetings with 2BeUs and Social Workers and to devise a number of key actions to be shared with Children's Services. Actions to include:

- To increase engagement and promotion of 2BeUS
- To develop a webpage/website for 2BeUS
- To improve the Council's future work offer for looked after children
- To develop a contact card for looked after children to access support and guidance

Resolved: That a summary paper is drafted with a list of key themes from the Panel's recent activity and the actions to be taken forward with Children's Services.

19. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Voice of the Child Overview Panel will take place on Wednesday 14 February 2018.

20. URGENT ITEMS

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

CHAIR