

Annex 16 – Minutes of an oral evidence session with User Voice and Participation officers on 7 August 2020

No Wrong Door Task Group

Minutes of a meeting with Officers from Surrey County Council's User Voice and Participation Service

Microsoft Teams
12 pm on 7 August 2020

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In attendance:

Councillor Lesley Steeds (Task Group Chairman)
Councillor Chris Botten
Councillor Liz Bowes
Councillor Chris Townsend
Councillor Barbara Thomson

Benjamin Awkal, Scrutiny Officer

Witnesses:

Jamie-Leigh Clark – Assistant Manager
Daniel Lee-Grabowski – Officer
Amy Caddy – Apprentice
Verritty Omonuwa – Bank worker
Peter Kiberu – Bank worker

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The witnesses agreed that the minutes of the meeting could be published.
2. The Assistant Manager explained that the Service was responsible for representing the voice of all children and young people in Surrey and influencing service changes. It ran a number of participation groups for service users and their parents and carers to ensure their voices were heard at board level.
3. A Member asked for the witnesses' views on the idea to bring together the different people who support service users into one team. The Officer liked the idea of having one team around a young person; in his experience, children and young people were passed from pillar to post by the professionals and teams which supported them. Children and young people liked the idea of a solid team which remains with a young person throughout their journey into and out of care.
4. A Member commented on the importance of building relationships of trust between workers and service users and asked how the council can ensure a consistent and committed work force. The Assistant Manager supported the Member's view but felt that the question would be better directed to Human Resources. Citing service users who had had 22 workers in 10 years, she described changes in worker as hugely impacting service users. The Service supported Human Resources by including young people on recruitment panels but was unsure of how staff turnover could be reduced. Through the Surrey Children's Service Academy, Surrey County Council was funding some social work students' studies in exchange

for their commitment to working for the council for a fixed period post-qualification. The Member requested that the Scrutiny Officer ascertain how many students were participating in the scheme.

5. A Member queried the impact of out-of-county residential placements on looked-after children. The Assistant Manager said that the Service struggled to engage with children placed out of county; however, remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic had enabled the Service to better engage looked-after children who were placed out of county. The Assistant Manager highlighted the case of care leaver who was attending university outside of Surrey and had been unable to access specialist CAMHS support due to her being registered with a non-Surrey GP.
6. A Member stated that bringing more out-of-county service users back into Surrey needed to be a priority. The Assistant Manager explained that the Service was to introduce a younginspector programme under which young people were to inspect residential placements and provide feedback. She added that it was important to remember that each service user is an individual and, whilst out-of-county placements are generally undesirable, they would be appropriate for some individuals. A related issue was that care leavers could only be housed in Surrey and sometimes this created an undesirable transition. The Officer supported the Assistant Manager's comments.
7. A Member requested that the Scrutiny Officer ascertain how many looked-after children were placed out of county.
8. A Member referred to information from the Big Survey 2020 indicating that service users expected contact from their social workers every six weeks. The Assistant Manager explained that the six-week figure was a statutory requirement for two-way contact between looked-after children and their social workers; personal advisors were required to make two-way contact with care leavers at least every two months. The Assistant Manager stated that the six-week figure could put pressure on young people and reiterated that each service user is an individual and some would want more or less frequent contact than that prescribed by the Regulations.
9. A Member asked the Scrutiny Officer to ascertain what proportion of looked-after children are seen by a social worker within six weeks of their previous contact.
10. A Member asked how education and career support was delivered at present and how it should be delivered in the future. The Officer believed that a single person or team providing such support would not be optimal, a joint effort between the professionals, carers and educational settings supporting young people was preferable. The Officer did not believe that No Wrong Door model was the most appropriate way of delivering education and careers support and believed it would be better to utilise the skills and experience of the people who know each service user best; however, signposting from the No Wrong Door to specific career and educational support would be appropriate. The Assistant Manager added that each looked-after child was assigned a teacher to support their educational development and queried how the Virtual School would interact with the No Wrong Door model if the latter was introduced.

11. A Member highlighted that the Big Survey 2020 found that 48% of service users did not know what the Virtual School was. The Assistant Manager explained that User Voice and Participation was working with the Virtual School to relaunch the service.
12. The Chairman invited the Bank Workers to share their views on the Virtual School. Peter did not possess a comprehensive understanding of the Virtual School but believed that it was committed to improving its outreach. Verritty agreed that the Virtual School's outreach required improvement, explaining that her only interaction with it as a service user was when receiving books and stationery, which it had since stopped providing to looked-after children. She commended the commitment and drive of the virtual school's new Head Teacher.
13. The Chairman invited the Bank Workers to share their views on the No Wrong Door model. Peter had spoken about the model with several groups of service users. He reported that it was important to avoid giving service users unrealistic expectations of the same worker supporting them throughout their interaction with services. Peter suggested that under the No Wrong Door, if introduced, workers might hold one another to account for the quality of the services they provide. Amy cautioned against describing the No Wrong Door model in a way which would lead service users to believe that their No Wrong Door workers would remain with them throughout their time in care, as this was not possible to guarantee. The Officer believed that the emphasis should be on the team of workers supporting service users continuously, rather than the individual professionals. A Member agreed.
14. A Member asked how well the mental and physical health needs of looked-after children were met. The Officer commented that mental health support was often not available to service users quickly enough to prevent the deterioration of conditions. Looked-after children received annual health assessments. The Assistant Manager highlighted that young people generally knew who to contact about their health needs and well supported in that respect and, in fact, could access more services than young people who are not looked after.

Actions:

- i. For the Scrutiny Officer to ascertain the number of social work students who had committed to working for Surrey County Council after they graduate under a scheme run by the Surrey Children's Service Academy.
- ii. For the Scrutiny Officer to ascertain how many looked-after children are placed out of county.
- iii. For the Scrutiny Officer to ascertain what proportion of looked-after children are seen by a social worker within six weeks of their previous contact.

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