

Summary Sheet

Council Report

Title: Rotherham's Right 2 Rights Service

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Ian Thomas

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

All Wards are affected

Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Corporate Parenting Panel, focusing on the developments of the Right 2 Rights service.

The agreement to increase staffing levels within the service in order to address the difficulties faced by the service, and which were highlighted by the Ofsted inspection, has increased the capacity within the team. At the last report to Corporate parenting the new staff members had only been in place for eight weeks, so the key aim of the report is to highlight the progress made and agree key areas for further development.

The overall aim / outcome of the service is embedded in statute and highlights the need to support young people to have their voice heard, especially when key decisions are being made around where they will live, go to school and who they can see. The service also has a specific role to help young people raise concerns around the service they may have received and where requested support them to make a complaint. The intended outcome of the additional staff was to provide a more focused and timely response to the young people, so they know their rights and have had their voices heard and taken into account, via an effective and well-resourced Rights, Advocacy and Independent Visitor Service.

Recommendations

- That the Corporate Parenting Panel notes the contents of the report.
- That the Corporate Parenting Panel note the key role that the Right 2 Rights Service play in supporting looked after children and young people and in ensuring that their wishes and feelings are acknowledged, recorded and appropriately acted upon.
- That the Corporate parenting panel have overview and give agreement around the key priorities for the service moving forward

List of Appendices Included

None

Background Papers

- The Children Act (1989) Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review.
- The Children Act (1989) Schedule 2, Paragraph 17
- The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 (s.17)
- Definition of Independent Visitors (Children) Regulations 1991 Statutory Instrument 1991 No 892.
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2013)
- United Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

No

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Rotherham's Right 2 Rights Service, Progress Report.

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That Corporate Parenting Panel notes the contents of the report:
- 1.2 That Corporate Parenting Panel note the key role that the Right 2 Rights Service play in supporting looked after children and young people and in ensuring that their wishes and feelings are acknowledged, recorded and appropriately acted upon.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Children's Rights Service within RMBC commenced in 1999 with the introduction of the Children's Rights Officer post which has gradually evolved into the current Right 2 Rights Service. We provide services for children and young people who are, or who have been, looked after by the local authority. We also work with children and young people with learning / physical difficulties or disabilities who access services at the Orchard Centre. Until October 2015 we had one full time Team manager and one part time advocate. From November 2015 we have a Team Manager, a full time advocate and 2 advocates on 30 hour contracts and a dedicated Business support officer.

- 2.2 The Ofsted Inspection in October, 2014 highlighted;

“The Right 2 Rights Service provides independent Visitors and advocacy services, which children like”

It is positive that Ofsted acknowledged the work that was being undertaken to support LAC and those placed out of authority as it demonstrated that where capacity allowed the service had an impact for the young people who were supported. The key issues raised related to capacity, it was highlighted that there was a high level of referrals awaiting allocation for an Advocate or Independent Visitor (IV).

The new staffing structure has as a direct result of this feedback, supporting us to develop on an in-house service that has good feedback from young people

3. Key Issues

The main elements of the service are as follows;

3.1 Rights and Raising Awareness for Young People Looked After

An area of improvement highlighted by Ofsted was to, **“Ensure that all looked after children and young people and care leavers have a clear understanding of their rights and entitlements”**.

In order to support improvements in how we engage with young people about their rights and make them aware of the Rights to Rights service, we changed how we introduce our service to all young people. From the 1st January, 2016 we have arranged visits to all children and young people over the age of 5 years who have become looked after. This involves an advocate visiting each child within their first month after coming into care and this has included those who are placed out of authority. This ensures that young people have knowledge of the service, know how to make a self-referral, have access to the complaints procedures, and if appropriate, have access to their entitlements around leaving care.

We have had 3 direct referrals for Advocacy from Young people themselves as a result of these visits, and a further 2 from social workers, which shows the profile of the service is growing with young people themselves.

3.2 Advocacy

Advocacy provides, information, advice, representation and support. Looked after children and young people are empowered to express their views, wishes, feelings and needs in creative and informative ways. If they are struggling to or are unable or unwilling to share their views with professionals or carers the aim of the service is to empower, support and assist them, to have their voice and views heard and taken into account.

3.3 Advocacy Referrals and Themes

There is now a clear referral system which gathers the key information and sets targets for work to be undertaken and identifies outcomes to be achieved. Referrals are received directly from children and young people or from social workers, carers, IRO's and schools. The service is able to respond more effectively to requests and all current advocacy referrals are allocated to an advocate within 3 weeks of being received.

Children and young people are expected to give their consent to the service although there is some undirected advocacy for younger children and those with disabilities or learning difficulties who are unable to give

consent or direction. At the beginning of the input there is an agreement drawn up about the issues and the resolution that the YP is seeking, and this is reviewed and supports decision making around the ending of the service provision.

The figures below consider the 10 month period from 01.1.15 to 01.11.15 in table 1, then 01.11.15 to 31.4.16 in table 2 to highlight the work undertaken by the service in context:

Table 1

Advocacy Referrals January, 2015 – November, 2015	
Active referrals carried forward from 2014	39
Referrals received January, 2015 – November, 2015 Inc.	56
Advocacy referrals closed	37
Advocacy referrals refused by the child or young person	1
Advocacy referrals withdrawn by social worker	2
Numbers awaiting allocation	0
Number of current active advocacy cases	55

Table 2

Advocacy Referrals November 2015 to end of April 2016	
Active referrals - ongoing work	46
New referrals received December 2015 - end April 2016	42
Advocacy referrals where a resolution has been reached	10
Advocacy referrals refused by the child or young person	0
Advocacy referrals withdrawn by social worker	1
Numbers awaiting allocation	2
Number of current active advocacy cases	77

3.4 Table 3 Themes, Issues and Impact of the Service

Themes and Issues of referrals from November 2015 to end April 2016	
To have someone to support them have their voice heard	23
To be listened to about their accommodation / placement	4
To be supported to have an effective transition plan	7
To be supported to access legal advice	4
To have a change of SW	4
To be able to change school/ go to a school of their choice	2
To have their wishes and feelings heard around contact	1

Out of the above referral figures and themes, we can identify that we have engaged with 8 young people who have a disability, one young person is seeking asylum, one is in secure accommodation and one is remanded. We have become involved more quickly with these young people because of the visits to young people who have become looked after. This supports the Young person's voice to be heard and accounted for more effectively through their review and early care planning.

In relation to issues around Transition, 3 referrals are specifically from young people with profound disabilities, where there have been issues re Adult Social Care and delays in assessments. This has been raised at a strategic level, as it reflects concerns around transitions and services apparent in RMBC currently.

In relation to resolution, not all of the advocacy referrals have been closed down and some advocacy relationships run for longer periods, at the request of the YP. This is often due to new issues, those in the complaints process, and in order to see the matter resolved in line with the YP's views. Often there are multiple and changing issues, that leads a number of young people to regularly seek input from the service.

In terms of the referrals around school, changes in social worker and accommodation, these were dealt with swiftly and all the matters have been resolved with closing pieces of work to be completed. This has meant some young people have moved to their preferred school, or accommodation. Those that have not experienced change have, agreed to the referral being closed, because they have been more involved in the decision making, or in relation to Social Worker relationships, feel the service has supported a better working relationship with their allocated social workers as a result.

While a number of the referrals seem to be around the child's voice and this seems to be undirected, significant feedback from 2 young people recently has been that they come back to the Advocacy service over and over again because they see this advocate as someone who listens to them and tries to support the changes they want.

3.5. Independent Visitor Service

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council is duty bound by legislation to provide a Volunteer Independent Visitor Service for looked after children and young.

The Children and Young Persons Act (2008) places a duty on us to make Independent Visitors available to all children in care if this is deemed to be in their best interests.

The Independent Visitor (IV) role is that of a befriender, once trained and matched with a child or young person they will function independent of the authority. They will not receive regular close supervision or be case managed however, risk assessments will be conducted as part of the matching process and safeguards and support measures will be put in place for emergency situations. They will be expected to attend support sessions at six weekly intervals and further training opportunities will be available.

The relationship is a confidential one and information is only shared if the child or young person agrees, dependent on age and understanding, or if safeguarding issues arise. The volunteers receive no payment, only expenses around travel and activities that are agreed with the young person, as part of their plan.

3.6 Recruitment and Retention of IV's

Some of the IV's have been with us for four and five years some expressing a strong wish to remain with the child throughout their care experience. Whilst the service cannot dictate how long a volunteer stays, efforts are made to emphasise that this is a long term commitment and that is expected that they remain with the service for at least 2 years. Most volunteers appreciate the nature of the commitment and that they need to give time to build up appropriate relationships with the child and to ensure that they are not further 'let down' by failed commitments to them.

There has been a clear reduction in volunteers applying to Rotherham and it is felt that this is partially due to the difficult times we have faced recently as an authority. We have therefore only trained 2 in the last 6 months, and we have lost more in natural turnover as people's circumstances change.

Volunteer Independent Visitor (IV) Service as 30.4.16	
Fully trained IV's	13
IV's in training	2
IV's allocated to LAC	12
IV's in matching process with named LAC	3
IV on hold	1
Children awaiting allocation	3

The feedback from young people around their IV's has overwhelmingly been positive. The allocation of the IV is considered as part of the looked after review and there is an annual review of the service provided to the young person by the Rights to Rights manages, to ensure the YP's agreed outcomes are being progressed.

A concern is that the number of referrals for IV's seems to have dropped and there is a concern that long waiting lists have impacted upon this, and this needs to be addressed, via a new publicity drive, including the IRO's.

A new episode of recruitment for Volunteer Independent Visitors is due to commence in the next 6 weeks, with a concerted effort around linking with the universities locally as this has been a real area of success around recruitment historically. We are also considering the use of opportunities such as the free press and RMBC Communications for future awareness raising and recruitment.

3.7 Key Priorities

Over the next 6 months we have four main areas that we are working on addressing as our key priorities:

- To provide a timely response to all requests for advocacy and to ensure that we record the YP's views about the service to aid service development for the future.
- To review the cases we have active for over 12 months to ensure we prioritising access to the service.
- To increase our pool of IV's and have an increase number of young people matched with IV's.
- To include the child's voice / feedback in how we develop the service.

4. Options considered and recommended proposal

4.1 Paper for Review by DLT only

5. Consultation

5.1 Paper for review by DLT Only

6. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

6.1 Paper for review by DLT Only

7. Financial and Procurement Implications

7.1 Paper for review by DLT Only

8. Legal Implications

8.1 Paper for review by DLT Only

9. Human Resources Implications

9.1 Paper for review by DLT Only

10. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

10.1 Over the next six months it is expected that we will see continued improvements within our service delivery to support to Our Looked after children and YP. As outlined in the report the increase in staffing has ensured that we are now more able to meet the rights and advocacy and independent needs of RMBC Looked after population. We are looking to further focus this in the next 6 months so we can better evidence the outcomes for young people and increase the support offered via the advocates and IV's.

11. Equalities and Human Rights Implications

11.1 It is an expectation that looked after children have equal access to services regardless of where they are placed. Advocacy services for such children and young people is vital, we will ensure that every effort is made to engage and consult with **all** LAC, empowering and supporting them to understand their rights and to challenge services when necessary. We equally need to involve them in the future development of services, supporting them in highlighting positive experiences and proposing changes when required.

12. Implications for Partners and Other Directorates

12.1 Paper for review by DLT Only

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 Paper for review by DLT Only

14. Accountable Officer(s)

14.1 Team Manager and Service Manager

Approvals Obtained from:-

Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services:- Paul Jackson

Director of Legal Services:- Neil Concannon

Head of HR(if appropriate):-Luke Rickett

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