

Pathways to Independence (P2i) Update

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Cabinet Member: Cllr Frances Nicholson, Lead Member for Children

Division and Local Member: All

1. Summary

- 1.1.** Somerset County Council and the Somerset District Councils have statutory responsibilities in relation to homeless 16 to 17 year olds and Care Leavers up to the age of 25. Some of the duties are met through an integrated commissioned service called Pathways to Independence Service (P2i).

The Pathways to Independence Service (P2i) allows young people with housing related support needs to access person-centred support, until they are able to sustain independent living without the need for support.

The newly commissioned P2i service delivery model started on 1st January 2017. This report has been requested to update Scrutiny Committee members of the progress since that time.

- 1.2.** The service meets the requirement stated in the County Plan to continue to prioritise the vulnerable children and adults who need our help most.
- 1.3.** P2i contributes to meeting the following improvements priorities within the Children and Young People Plan 2016 - 2019
- Supporting children and families to become more resilient – through the comprehensive mediation service aimed at returning and sustaining young people within the family home
 - Improving emotional health and wellbeing – through ensuring P2i is psychologically informed and focused on the health and emotional wellbeing needs of the young people supported through an outcomes focus approach
 - Building skills for life – though the focus P2i has on education, training and employment and on the requirement for providers to enable young people to develop independent living skills and sustain independence
 - Providing help early and effectively – through a comprehensive countywide early help, prevention and mediation service
 - Achieving effective multi-agency support for more vulnerable children and young people – P2i has been commissioned and will be delivered with the involvement and coproduction of all relevant partners.

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1.** Members are asked to consider and comment on this report.

3. Background/Update

- 3.1.** The newly commissioned P2i service began operation on 1st January 2017. The

transition of all young people from the two outgoing providers was managed by a comprehensive transition plan being in place for all young people. Young people were moved on to suitable accommodation or independent living as appropriate to their needs. As of the 1st January 2017 42 young people within South Somerset and 46 young people within Taunton Deane successfully transitioned.

- 3.2.** New P2i Panels for allocating services for young people and providing multi-agency support were set up in all areas on a rotational basis from 1st January 2017. These panels have been very well attended and successful in their operation. Young people are discussed on an individual basis and professionals from various agencies including providers, Targeted Youth Support (TYS), Leaving Care, Social Workers etc. attend the panel to discuss the best route forwards for the individual. Since 1st January 2017 a total of 207 young people have been discussed at this panel (some of these will be multiple discussions about the same young person). An average of 17 young people are discussed at each weekly panel with an average of 7 (40%) of these being care leavers.

The P2i Commissioner has also been attending these panels to ensure that the process is running smoothly and to consider any strategic issues that arise. A panel was recently attended by the new Strategic Manager for Prevention in Children's Service who was very impressed with the level of partnership working and the real intention of the panel to do what was in the best interest of the young person and come up with creative solutions if needed.

- 3.3.** The P2i Coordinator is a secondee from Sedgemoor District Housing and an expert in young people's housing rights and the duties of the respective organisations. A further 6 months secondment has been successfully negotiated to allow her to remain in post until end of September 2017. This has been an invaluable source of expertise and appropriate challenge when needed. It has also further cemented relationships with District Council colleagues.
- 3.4.** P2i Hubs are now operational in four areas in Somerset; Bridgwater, Taunton, Shepton Mallet and Yeovil. These Hubs have a full time worker provided from SCC (either a TYS or Leaving Care worker) as well as a full time P2i Homelessness Prevention Officer provided by District Councils (half time post in South Somerset). The Hubs are the first point of contact for young people when they are faced with housing issues and provide advice guidance and support. Hub workers also carry out assessments of need (using the Early Help Assessment) to understand in more depth the support required and also complete a risk assessment for any service provision. The South Somerset hub (currently operating from Morley House) is due to begin operation from Petters Way in a partnership arrangement with South Somerset District Council from 18th April 2017.
- 3.5.** The P2i Mediation service is currently being managed by Targeted Youth Support and two full time workers cover the county. The Mediation service is working with families and young people offering a quick response to try to make sure the young person can go home if it is safe to do so. They also work with the young person to show them the reality of the types of accommodation options available to them and also in finding out if there are any other solutions open to them e.g. staying with extended family or finding private rented accommodation. This service is already experiencing high demand and a report is being drafted to look at the need in the first quarter of operation and to possibly request further resource for two additional workers to be appointed, thereby providing one post

for each area of the county.

- 3.6.** There are two providers commissioned to provide P2i Services until January 2020. Mendip YMCA covers Mendip and South Somerset areas and YMCA Somerset Coast covers Taunton Deane and West Somerset and Sedgemoor areas. The providers have worked very hard to ensure that there were sufficient units of accommodation available by the 1st January in all areas, and that every young person transitioned appropriately according to their needs. A new contract management framework that is outcomes based and built on quality management and continuous improvement methodologies has been implemented which will provide a fully rounded picture of these services going forwards identifying areas of improvement and celebrating success.
- 3.7.** The P2i service has been identified by DCLG and St Basils as an exemplar project of best practice for commissioning homelessness services for young people nationally. The P2i Commissioner and P2i Coordinator were invited to present at an LGA conference in London in January to share best practice on commissioning housing services for young people in two tier authorities. The presentation was very well received and requests for support have been received from several local authorities nationwide. P2i was also invited to speak at a recent conference held in Bristol on best practice in Homeless Models for Children and Young People. A further conference event is planned to be held in Somerset at the end of June 2017 led by LGA to follow up on the January event and to accommodate the high number of requests to visit the service from other local authorities.

4. Consultations undertaken

- 4.1.** Feedback has been very positive on the new service from a variety of agencies, providers as well as young people themselves. Consultation and feedback are inherently built into the new contract management framework as part of continuous improvement.
- 4.2.** A quote from a Young Person in P2i Accommodation:
'I would really like to thank the Mendip YMCA project for helping me achieve as much as I have so far. I've been living at the YMCA about four months in Frome and I love the YMCA project as a whole and what it has done for me. I'm grateful for the introduction and welcome feeling which allowed me to feel comfortable during my stay. I'd also like to thank all the staff for helping me achieve everything I have so far. I came from residential care and other placements which I found very unhelpful if not making my situation worse where I cannot live at home. Since I have been at the foyer, I feel an overall improvement in my quality of life, including mood which I used to struggle with quite a lot, family relationships such as mum, dad and girlfriend have all improved and I'm out doing more in the community such as going to college.'

I have achieved more through my current four month stay at the foyer than I have in my past 18 years of my life, to which I know this will continue for the rest of my stay. You are all doing an amazing job at helping me become independent in an array of ways, and I'm so so grateful for this!

- 4.3.** Feedback from P2i provider staff:
Cluster Units

It's still early days but the new model is presenting some really clear positives already. The young people who moved into our first cluster unit were openly delighted at having such lovely accommodation offered to them and the transition from 'housing project' to house/home' has had an obvious and positive impact in the sense of 'normalising' behaviour. Cooking together, negotiating behaviours at house meetings, using the washing machine correctly and even sorting a rota for putting out the recycling have become fairly regular domestic routines and we know that routines are a powerful antidote to chaotic behaviours and thoughts. Two of the young people in our first house had presented quite challenging behaviours at the Foyer on an ongoing basis. After a few weeks in the house during January one started to revert to some old habits and we discussed with her the possibility of moving her back to the core unit as she did not seem ready for cluster. The impact on her behaviours was immediate and has been pretty much sustained as she was so determined to stay in the house as she loved it so much. One young man at our first cluster house has stayed there with reasonably calm success since January which is the longest he has been known to settle in a single place.

Panels

The panels have been overwhelmingly positive in their impact I think. They have become a place where we know options can be discussed with a group of knowledgeable colleagues who have a keen interest in helping make things work for young people. When faced with managing a very challenging young person it's a huge source of help and support and I think will build mutual understanding of the possibilities and limitations all parties are working with. I think it has helped build relationships across services and this can only help improve effective joint working down the line which will be so critical for the services success.

5. Challenges/Next Steps

- 5.1.** There are still challenges with providing suitable accommodation for a small number of very high needs young people including those with undiagnosed and diagnosed mental health issues as well as offending/re-offending behaviour. The P2i Commissioner is working with the Police, Leaving Care, Adult Social Care, Public Health amongst others to try to address some of these issues and find alternative solutions.
- 5.2.** A training programme for all P2i Hub staff is being put in place to make sure that all staff share the same knowledge and skills in areas such as Emotion Coaching, Housing Advice, Signposting and Assessments.
- 5.3.** Expansion of the Mediation service to make sure this is as responsive as required in all areas to prevent homelessness and unnecessary placements to limited emergency accommodation.
- 5.4.** Further work and training with Children's Social Care staff to reach a shared policy position on the 16/17 year old duty and processes to be followed. Training and communications with Children's Social Care staff to make sure they are aware of the changes to the P2i service and what the new model can and can't offer.
- 5.5.** Further automation of assessment and referral processes using the new Early Help Module via the Children's Social Care database LCS. This will ensure background and historical information on young people can be established

quickly making for a safer and more responsive information sharing process.

6. Background papers

6.1. None.