

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. Pathway to Independence (P2i) is an innovative partnership project between Somerset County Council, the five district councils (Sedgemoor, South Somerset, Mendip, Taunton Deane and West Somerset and two major housing providers for young people across Somerset, YMCA Somerset Coast and YMCA Mendip and South Somerset.

The P2i service offers support for homeless and vulnerable young people aged between 16 to 25 years (inclusive). The service meets some of the statutory duties for local authorities under current homelessness legislation in relation to homeless 16 to 17 year olds and care leavers up to the age of 25. The service covers an assessment of needs, family mediation, housing advice, emergency accommodation, supported housing, floating support and signposting to other services as appropriate.

- 1.2. Each district has a P2i ‘Hub’ providing a single point of access in each district area. Staffing for the hubs is being provided by County and District Council Employees. 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 carry out assessments of need using the Early Help Assessment (EHA) to understand in more depth the support required, complete a risk assessment for any service provision and after the assessment process, each young person entering the Pathway will have an integrated and holistic independence plan agreed with them.

The mediation service provision is currently staffed within the County Council Targeted Youth Service (TYS).

- 1.3. The contract and specification for the Accommodation and Support Provision is outcomes based and expects the providers to meet the young people’s needs in a holistic way. Young people should progress along a pathway of targeted interventions, through the creation of a multi-agency person-centred plan, to ensure they are able to achieve agreed outcomes relevant to their needs and aspirations. It is designed to ensure that all young people leaving the pathway are able to sustain independent living, including economic independence and build and maintain positive supportive friendships with friends, family and colleagues.

In order to achieve this the young people will achieve improved outcomes across five outcomes areas:

- Achieving economic wellbeing
- Make a positive contribution
- Be healthy
- Enjoying and Achieving
- Staying safe

The providers will work in partnership with other agencies and provide opportunities for education, employment and volunteering. The providers are embedded within their communities and provide added and social value initiatives.

The service contributes to meeting improvement priorities within the Children and young Peoples plan 2016-2019 and also meets the requirement stated in the County Plan to continue to prioritise the vulnerable children and adults who need our help most.

2. Issues for consideration/Recommendations

- 2.1. This report is for information only, however the Committee are asked to consider and comment on Section 5 of the report – Challenges and Next Steps.

3. Background/Update

- 3.1. The P2i contract commenced on 1st January 2017 and initially runs until 31st December 2019 with an option to extend for up to 2 years (in one year increments). Regular monitoring of contract performance is undertaken in the form of weekly information from panels and accommodation plans; monthly and quarterly data returns and an annual self-assessment and review process. Reports are presented to the Board on a quarterly and annual basis.
- 3.2. The providers have worked very hard to ensure that there are sufficient units of accommodation available in all district areas and that every young person is transitioned appropriately according to their needs. The outcomes based contract management framework provides a fully rounded picture of the services and identifies areas of improvement and success.
- 3.3. From January to December 2017, a total of 542 Young People were supported by the P2i service.
 - 40% South Somerset
 - 26% Taunton
 - 19% Mendip
 - 11% Sedgemoor
 - 4% West Somerset
 - A total of 235 young people were accommodated by the service.
 - 85% of departures from accommodation based services were positive and planned
 - 28% of service users are Children's Social Care statutory responsibility with the other 72% supported under other statutory duties.

- 3.4. The P2i Coordinator role is now a permanent post within Somerset County Council.
- 3.5. The P2i Mediation service has four full time TYS workers to 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 received 146 referrals up until the end of December 2017 with 103 of those allocated for mediation. 43 inappropriate referrals were received in the first year. Success rates were at 50% for quarter 4 (Oct-Dec 2017). Commissioners are considering how we can increase the performance and effectiveness in this area in particular and also need to work through the impacts of the Homelessness Reduction Act (new duties wef 1st April 2018) and the impact this has.

- 3.6. The P2i service allocation and review panel meets weekly for collective decision making, with a strong process and robust chair. It has excellent attendance by all partners, with creative solutions found for more complex cases. Commissioners will be attending a panel meeting as part of the annual review process.
- 3.7. The Annual Review process for the first year of the contract is underway. Somerset County Council Commissioners are visiting the P2i providers in March and early April to carry out the Annual Review visits. This will include consideration of a self-assessment completed by providers, a spot file audit, consultations with staff, a peer review and visits to hubs and accommodation.

We are working with Health and Social care students to provide the peer review of the service through our Young Commissioners Project. Students are carrying out visits to the P2i provision, talking to residents about how they find the service and answering specific outcome related questions from the outcomes framework. They will produce a report which will be fed back to the P2i Board and form part of the annual review.

4. Consultations undertaken

- 4.1. Consultation and feedback are inherently built into the contract management framework as part of continuous improvement. Feedback gathered so far as part of the annual review process has been positive.
- 4.2. Young Commissioners have undertaken a peer review of both providers and we are waiting for the report.
- 4.3. Commissioners have consulted with P2i provider staff in South Somerset, Mendip and Sedgemoor as part of their annual review visits.

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 keen to work with other agencies, Police, Leaving Care, Adult Social Care, and Public Health and District Councils to try to address some of these issues and find alternative solutions.

- 5.2. The number of host families is falling short of the contract, only 17 are being provided as at December 2017. All areas except Mendip are struggling to recruit families to join the scheme and are finding it increasingly hard to place young people within a family environment due to increasingly complex needs and behaviour issues particularly mental health. This is also an area that needs a deep dive review in the next quarter.
- 5.3. The accommodation in Taunton has been falling short of contracted levels; however, the provider had been working on a plan to rectify this by the end of April 2018. YMCA Somerset Coast is in the process of developing a social enterprise Hotel in Taunton which will provide some units of accommodation for P2i as well as work and training opportunities for young people based on the successful model in West Somerset.
- 5.4. The recruitment of a psychologist has not been successful due to a national shortage of clinical psychologists. This means the service and P2i staff are not receiving the level of expertise or professional supervision that was part of the original service model. Commissioners are considering an in-house option and are in dialogue with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) service through the Commissioning Academy. However, one year into the contract we can now provide greater clarity to our assumptions and are consulting with providers about their need during the annual review.
- 5.5. Consideration needs to be given to extending the contract beyond the current end date of 31st December to the end of the financial year, as should there be any changes in accommodation as a result of contract arrangements; we know this time of year is not good for individuals who may move.

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The Act fundamentally changes the homelessness legislation by introducing a statutory duty to intervene at earlier stages to help prevent homelessness and requiring action to help secure accommodation for applicants who are homeless. It places new legal duties on local authorities so that everyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness will have access to meaningful help, irrespective of their priority need status, as long as they are eligible for assistance.

These include:

1. An enhanced prevention duty extending the period a household is threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days
2. A new duty for those who are already homeless so that housing authorities will support households for 56 days to relieve their homelessness by helping them to secure accommodation
3. A duty to provide appropriate advice and information
4. A duty to carry out an assessment and develop personalised housing plans

5. Care leavers will have more choice on local connection
6. A duty on public bodies to refer service users

Although Guidance for local authorities has been issued, the guidance for 16 -17 year olds has been delayed. Commissioners have contacted Anna Whalen, Youth Homelessness Advisor for the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to understand the implications for care leavers and P2i services.

Commissioners have attended a training event and are still considering the impact of the legislation on the P2i contract and partner duties with district council colleagues and Adults Commissioning.

The challenges identified so far:

- Increase in duties and workload for local authorities
- New MHCLG data collection requirements
- All care leavers under the age of 21 will be considered as having a local connection with an area if they were looked after, accommodated or fostered there for a continuous period of at least two years
- Increase in caseload for frontline staff
- Partners must be involved, Housing authorities cannot do this alone
- There is a need to change the system-wide culture, this is everyone's business.

6. Background papers

6.1. None.