



Children's Services Partnership Forum Report following the meeting in December 2014

Why have a Children's Services Partnership Forum?

Following the refresh of the city's Sustainable Community Strategy, Brighton & Hove: The Connected City, it was decided to create a new overarching partnership forum to focus on all elements of children's services across the city.

This new partnership is not a new governance structure and holds no direct budget accountability. It's a discursive group whose purpose is to allow the key stakeholders opportunities to network, problem solve and to jointly provide strategic leadership on our outcomes for children, young people and their families by working to a shared vision. It will connect organisations and services together to deliver real differences within the city.

This new forum will operate within the context of existing partnership arrangements. The forum can take a role in challenging those partnerships and recommending new arrangements when needed.

The December event

The event was held on 1st December at the Brighthelm Community Centre and was well attended with over 50 people signing in.

Tony Mernagh chaired proceedings and explained that much work had progressed in the six months since the first event in June, including the circulation of a high level data sharing agreement for the city.

Cllr Sue Shanks welcomed people to the event, spoke about the difficulties we were facing in terms of budgets and the need for collective service providers and users to work closer together in future.

Pinaki Ghoshal then introduced some of the current context for children's services across the city. This included recent developments such as establishment of an early help hub and our multi-agency safeguarding hub, work progressing on school place planning across the city, a drive to get more apprenticeships and recent budget proposals.

Guest speakers

Wook Hamilton spoke about the Right Here project that has been running for five years in Brighton & Hove. It's a young people led project promoting mental and emotional wellbeing. She also shared a video which can be viewed on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Al4hY4GHseo>

Richard Chamberlain is the Deputy Head at Blatchington Mill School and Sixth Form College and spoke about the range of pressures facing secondary aged young people in the city. He gave an interesting insight in to the range of mental health issues that are affecting young people at the moment.

Helen Gulvin is an Assistant Director within Children's Services at the council and she gave an overview of a proposed new service directly targeted at our most vulnerable young people in the city. This new service would look to better support those at risk of entering the care system in adolescence and to provide a more holistic day and night service.

Facilitated themes table discussions

The four themes were

- Mental health in schools
- Family support and emotional wellbeing
- Drugs, alcohol and mental health
- Crisis services

Here is a summary of what was heard across all four of the themed discussion groups

Some of the main points made included:

- More services need to be available outside normal office hours (eg 9-5), people need help at weekends and in evenings too!
- Good practice is too patchy across the city – all schools and services need to be good at supporting vulnerable young people
- Lots of information and support is already out there – but does everyone know where to find it? Could things be better signposted?
- The problems often sit with parents / families but end up affecting the young people eventually
- Drugs and alcohol is a big problem for the city
- People need to be aware of the pressures young people are under at exam time
- How can we deal with increasing need when there is less money to spend? How we can work better together to do this?
- Let's get things right first time
- Remember some of the things we used to do – don't always need to reinvent the wheel
- Let's deliver services around children and young people – not the other way around
- Relationships are key – having a trusted adult at the centre of the work
- The interface between services for children and young people and then adults is really significant
- Information sharing across agencies is a key concern and / or solution
- Do services users (or professionals) always know where to go for the right help?
- The role of parents / carers is really important

The event was designed to:

- Increase shared understanding of emotional wellbeing and mental health of children & young people in the city;
- Understand what is in place to support children and young people in terms of mental and emotional wellbeing and identifying what works well as well as the pressure points in the system;
- Increase understanding and opportunities to consider the importance of transition points throughout a young person's development, such as starting secondary school, entering exams, leaving school;
- Understand the role and value of universal services (e.g. schools, GPs) in terms of mental health and emotional wellbeing; and

- Inform the developing thinking about a strategy for emotional health and wellbeing for children and young people and how new pathways might be developed and services commissioned.

Feedback

30 feedback forms were completed – with the vast majority of respondents scoring highly or very highly that it was interesting, a good use of their time and relevant to their job.

It was clear that the speakers and the discussion time were valued equally with 25% of respondents citing 'All of it' as the best part of the day.

There were many useful suggestions made on potential topics for future events. These include importance of transition points (eg starting school, primary to secondary, exams or into adult services), early help and prevention, early years, child sexual exploitation, domestic violence and skills and employment.

Young People Involvement

Feedback from the first event in June suggested that we worked closer with Young People themselves, giving them an opportunity to scrutinise what is being said about their services and then to be able to input to the conversation themselves.

An event was held with some Youth Council representatives on 27th January 2015. They provided feedback on the issues discussed at the main forum event.

Some of the main points made included:

- Social media sites can be negative towards mental health, e.g. pro-anorexia websites, Ask FM and positive, e.g. Tumblr – or sometimes both
- Mental Health is felt to be a big issue in schools, especially amongst girls, but it was felt that schools do not do enough to respond to this
- Self-harm, mental health and depression are not spoken about in PSHE lessons
- People are too embarrassed to discuss mental health difficulties in schools
- Transition issues can be very critical
- Mental health issues need to be seen as serious as medical issues
- Self-harm needs to be seen as a bigger issue which needs to be taught about in school, as well as eating disorders
- There should be more specialist workers coming into schools and colleges to speak to young people about drugs and alcohol, so they know more about the negative effects of different drugs, including 'legal highs'
- A suggestion was made about developing a pool of young people in each school and college to be available to their peers, they will have inside intelligence – this might be similar to the 'buddy' scheme, to speak to their peers to help rather than judge them, as young people often won't talk to teachers or authority figures
- Two main reasons why young people drink/take drugs: 1) 'to have fun', but not aware of the damage and do it because of peer pressure 2) 'Self Abuse', affects mental wellbeing, too ashamed to admit or embarrassed/scared to admit it or sometimes crossed both, i.e. to take the 'pain' away, to feel 'free'.
- Adults need to be more aware of issues facing young people
- Schools are aware of the issue, but don't always do much about it
- Schools to better advertise where young people can go for help and support

Next steps

The Youth Council reps felt that they should be part of the wider forum meeting so future events will be organised with that in mind.

It was clear from the discussions both in December and at the inaugural meeting in June that there were some common themes or areas of concern coming through the varied discussions. Some of the main themes are listed below. The partnership forum can take this work forward in a variety of ways, including

- Focussed discussions / activities at future meetings
- Facilitated workshops at other times
- Encouraging networking and officers working together on shared work areas
- Encouraging existing partnerships to take forward specific areas of work
- Escalating ongoing concerns to relevant management teams

Suggested items for future forum meetings or communications

- Adolescents – the cost and poor outcomes for our vulnerable groups
- Joined up services – how to do this better with less
- Links with adult services – both for transition for young people 18+ but also the need to support how parents, families and carers are supported due to the impact on their children.
- A child friendly city – exploring what this means and how we set our ambitions
- Data sharing – are we sharing enough and acting legally?
- Domestic violence and neglect – both major areas of concern for our children and young people with a significant impact on outcomes
- The voice of children & young people – how can we ensure this is consistent and genuine
- Safeguarding – how to further promote, alongside the LSCB, the understanding that this is everyone's responsibility
- Children at Risk of Sexual Exploitation and Missing Children – an area of much concern and a lot of activity at the moment in the city

The Youth Council representatives also suggested the following as potential topics:

- Jobs and careers advice
- More Political education needed in schools

Members of the forum should take opportunities to share and take forward concerns raised and ideas created back within their 'home' organisations

regardless of whether a future partnership forum meeting discusses that particular topic or not.

Contacts

If you have any queries on this please contact:

Carolyn Bristow
Service Development Officer
Children's Services
Brighton & Hove City Council
01273 293736
Carolyn.bristow@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Simon Newell
Partnerships and External Relations Manager
Brighton & Hove Connected
01273 291128
Simon.newell@brighton-hove.gov.uk

