

**Notes of Plymouth and Family Forum**  
**21 May 2009**  
**9.00am – 12.00pm**  
**Welcome Hall**

**95 Attendees:**

**1. Introductions and Welcome**

EB welcomed everyone to the forum. She reminded parent representatives that they are the voice of their community and that what they say is appreciated and valued. Their concerns are fed back to the service providers.

Speakers were asked to keep acronyms to a minimum and the audience was invited to ask questions about anything they were unclear about.

**New Forum Attendees**

- The Chair of Parent's Again Support Group (PASG) and the representative from Plymouth Association of Governors (PAG) were introduced and welcomed.

**2. Service developments parents**

**a) Actions from last Forum:**

**Food Bank:**

Parent Partnership will be the point of contact for vouchers. PSAs will be able to access vouchers from PP. Final arrangements will be available in the next two weeks. The information will be available on Plymouth Parent Website.

One of the parent representatives commented that their school will be holding a mufti day to raise money to support the food bank initiative.

**Head Lice:**

- A number of parents attended a scrutiny panel for children and young people in 2008. There was to have been a follow up meeting it had been hoped that the Forum would have been involved. The meeting took place mainly with health professionals and the issues that had previously been brought up at the Forum were not addressed. BB said that the Forum will probably be looking at other initiatives regarding headlice.
- JO, Parent Representative, St Edward's Church of England Primary, informed the Forum that headscarves had been tried out at her school. The headscarves can be ordered through the school, are available in team colours and cost £2.50.
- The school nurse at St Edward's has contacted other school nurses to see if a headscarf trial can be initiated in other schools.
- JO will also be putting information about the 'nitty gritty' comb into her newsletter. Parents/carers can take a letter to their General Practitioner and obtain a free 'nitty gritty' comb.
- BB asked for volunteers from the Forum to lead on dealing with the headlice issue.
- National Bug Busting day will be held on 15 June 2009.

### **MC's questions from last Forum:**

The questions are available on the Plymouth Parent Website. MC is happy to extend the closing date to a week before the next Forum in order to give Parent Representatives time to obtain feedback from parents. BB reminded the attendees that the idea of the Forum is to obtain parental involvement.

#### **b) Free School Meals**

HF, Parent Representative had asked for a response from Plymouth City Council (PCC) as to what the criteria was for free school meals for children whose parents are receiving Working Tax Credits but are earning considerably less than £16000 per annum.

BP, Educational Catering Services, answered that the real issue is that the eligibility criteria for free school meals is set by Central Government and not by Local Authority. Those earning less than £16040, on Child Tax credits, are eligible. Those on Working Tax Credits are not. See website [www.plymouth.gov.uk/freemeals](http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/freemeals). Central Government, the Department for Children, Schools & Families (DCSF) and the School Food Trust are looking at ways of increasing the eligibility for free school meals.

In March 2009 Plymouth Authority decided it was unable to carry out the pilot for free school meals that the DCSF were offering as it would have cost the authority £1.5 - £3 million per year.

Three authorities are trialling the pilot from September 2009:

- 1) Durham, in partnership with their NHS Trust
- 2) Newham
- 3) Wolverhampton is looking at increasing and raising the eligibility criteria for all pupils/students in all schools. This will look at such things as income levels, tax credits.

The pilots will run for 2 years from September and will be reviewed to see whether they have an impact on take up, attendance, attainment and healthy lives on all children and to see whether that should be rolled out.

If we had taken up the pilot, the problem would have been what happens in two years time if it is decided not to go ahead?

School meal allowance is £1.70; actual cost is £2.31 making a 61p shortfall per meal. BP is asking School Food Trust and DCSF 'Is this a business (trading account) or a welfare service?' We were a trading account and ended up with meals which were cheap, with no nutrients and unbalanced. We are now in a situation where legislation says we can only provide certain food types and fourteen nutrients I don't think we should be called a trading account, we are a welfare service but we need to demonstrate the benefits of healthy school food. But we can't do that overnight.

In answer to a question from the floor: We can look at what the impact would be of changing the criteria because individually, the Educational Inspections Act 2006 changed the Local Authority responsibility from a 'duty to charge' to a 'power to charge'. I don't think the authority is in a position to do that at the moment but can do some work to see what the impact will be. There is no one in the city that can make that decision but we will certainly look at this.

EB asked if there is anything we can do to help and BP answered that by formally asking the questions, as had been done, he can take action from there.

BP has been invited back to the Forum in September 2009 to give a larger talk about school meals. Representatives were asked to ask parents to feed back so that the service can be worked on to provide a better one than already exists. Two years ago school food was not important, this has now changed.

Questions for September Plymouth and Family Forum, regarding school meals, to be emailed to [bob.burton@plymouth.gov.uk](mailto:bob.burton@plymouth.gov.uk)

### 3. Service Developments Service Providers

**a) MT – Extended Services Co-ordinator (ENCo)** promoted the 'School's Out' event to be held on 11 July 2009, on Plymouth Piazza. This is to inform parents/carers of activities going on across the city in the six week holiday period.

The School's out website address is: [www.plymouthschoolsout.org.uk](http://www.plymouthschoolsout.org.uk)

BB stated that representatives will be involved in entering information, about events taking place in school holidays, on to the website. For those with access to the Members' area, pending events can be seen.

Forum representatives were asked to go out into their localities, talk to organisations, update events on the website and point it out to parents. It is a valuable piece of information.

An email version of events will be sent out to all schools in mid June.

MT said that an advertisement re School's Out has been placed in the Primary Times. A flyer will be sent out to Parent Representatives in the schools and they are asked to help distribute these across the city.

Last year's School's Out was very successful. Nearly 2000 parents/carers including grandparents visited and feedback was positive.

In answer to a problem of Family Learning Session leaflets being delivered too late, resulting in sessions being already fully booked:

- CH agreed that it has been difficult to get things out on time this year, due to re-structure. This should be completed by July and things should improve from now on.
- In addition, the fact that sessions had been fully booked was positive; it shows that more sessions need to be made available. (CH)

**b) AA introduced JM, Researcher, Helping Children Achieve (HCA) trial**  
JM talked about the HCA research project (a parenting project for parents of younger children):

- The research project is part of an extended team in Hackney
- Research will influence what programmes will be available to parents in future.
- Parent Partnership is implementing the two training programmes:
  - 1) Supporting Parents On Kids Education (SPOKES)
    - research shows that it makes a difference to children's behaviour.
    - SPOKES is an early intervention programme for children with particular difficult behaviour problems, in Years 1 & 2.
    - The Literacy part of it is the SPOKES. It gives parents tips on how to read with their child.
    - It is a 12 week course.
  - 2) Incredible Years (IY)
    - Has been running for 30 years
    - Looks at behaviour, (no literacy) how to develop strategies for coping with this and how to build up a better rapport with your child.

The research project has four arms. Parents know at the beginning that they unable to choose which part of the trial to go on. They will go on one of the following:

- Incredible Years programme(25% of parents)
- SPOKES programme (25% of parents)
- Both Incredible Years and SPOKES (25% of parents)
- Control group (to compare what is happening in the other 3 groups) (25% of parents)

JM explained how the programmes run and asked for nominations for parents.

AA, Projects Manager, Parent Partnership, said that the nomination forms will be available on Plymouth Parent Partnership website. These forms (for the HCA trial) to go back to the researchers rather than Parent Partnership.

**c) JT, Practice Manager, Plymouth Parent Partnership made a request for parents to attend the **Parent Partnership Development Group**. This has now combined with the Parent Support Advisory Group and a wider parent representation is needed.**

The group meets three times a year, during the day. Help can be provided with transport and childcare costs.

**d) BB requested for parents to listen to the presentation part of **Locality Manager Interviews** to be held on 22 June 2009. A minimum of one parent from each locality is required.**

e) **AA** said that a **group for Young Carers is being developed**. Parent representatives are needed for this.

f) **14 – 19 Diploma Parent Views**. On behalf of Connexions 6 – 9 parents are needed on 15 June at around 5.00pm to answer some questions about 14 – 19 diplomas and generally about careers. All secondary parent representatives are asked to contact LD [lucy.daniels@plymouth.gov.uk](mailto:lucy.daniels@plymouth.gov.uk) for further details.

g) **Transitions events**. October half term. For those children with learning needs and disabilities and their parents/carers, to find out what's on next after 16. Please email [lucy.daniels@plymouth.gov.uk](mailto:lucy.daniels@plymouth.gov.uk)

#### 4. Visiting Support Groups and Agencies

KH raised awareness of **MEND** (Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do it)

- Works with overweight and obese children.
- MEND has been running for 2 years in Plymouth.
- Runs at the Jan Cutting Healthy Living Centre, Scott Hospital and groups are also run at Plympton, Devonport and Plymstock.
- Is a 10 week intervention programme, 2 hours twice a week, for parents and children. This involves talk about activity, nutrition, mind work (Cognitive Behaviour Therapy), fun sessions.
- Education is the main aim, for parents and children (aged 7 – 13).
- SHINE Programme (Self Help, Independence, Nutrition and Exercise):
  - For 13 – 17 year olds.
  - Is a 12 week programme for teenagers only (no parents).
  - Runs every Wednesday for 2.5 hours at Stoke Damerel Community College but KH is happy to run this course at other schools.
  - Is a more intensive course than MEND.
  - Consists of discussion followed by an exercise session and talk about activity.
  - Great success has been had with this group.
  - Provides support for 2 years or more.
- Both MEND and SHINE can be contacted on 01752 434623.

#### Questions:

*Why is it that a parent with more than one child can only bring one child on to Strengthening Families Programme with them?*

Part of the benefit of Strengthening Families is the one to one time the parents spend with the child in a family session. If a parent has more than one child with them they can't give that focussed attention.

#### 5. School Transport

JR, Manager, Children's Transport team, Windsor House, spoke to the Forum about transport issues:

- The team covers school transport, administration for free school meals and school crossing patrol service.
- 700 children are transported each day, the majority with special needs.
- The budget is approximately £3.2 million.

- Every child that applies for school transport is assessed on an individual basis.
- The basic criteria for assessment is:
  - Under 8's are eligible if they have a 2 mile or more walking distance to their nearest school.
  - Over 8's are eligible if they have a 3 mile or more walking distance to their nearest school.
  - The distance is measured using the shortest safe walking route and that may be accompanied by a parent if necessary.
  - If the distance is less than 2-3 miles then other circumstances may be taken into account eg physical disabilities or special needs that may prevent them from walking to school.
- Transport provision is only to the designated or nearest school.
- If a transport application is refused, the parents will be sent a letter and have the right to appeal.
- In 2008 the government brought in new legislation to help people on low income. This has been introduced for those who are eligible for free school meals or who are in receipt of the maximum level of working tax credits. So for primary school children, (under or over 8 years of age) in order to qualify under this criteria, the pupil must be attending their nearest or designated school and the distance must be more than two miles.
  - For secondary school criteria, the pupil must be attending one of their 3 nearest schools, measured on straight line distance. The school that they are attending has to measure more than 2 miles but less than 6 miles. The 6 mile limit is extended up to 15 miles for pupils attending faith schools.
- Families are re-assessed at the end of the school year.
- Independent travel trainers work with pupils primarily in Yrs 10 & 11 in special schools or who have statements of special educational needs. They will work with pupils on a 1:1 basis to help them become independent travellers for when they go on to post 16 education. 26 pupils have been trained to become independent travellers this year.
- Any transport questions can be emailed to [school.transport@plymouth.gov.uk](mailto:school.transport@plymouth.gov.uk)

## **Answers to Questions from Plymouth Parent and Family Forum of 21 May 2009**

See below: [Transport Questions](#)

### **6. Feedback from Forum Activities**

#### **6a Extended Pre-school entitlement (PB)**

- Is being changed from 12.5 to 15 hours from April 2010 (from September 2009 in some settings).
- There will be a very small number of pre-school entitlement places for 2 year olds.
- A leaflet will be available on Plymouth Parent website in approximately one month's time.

#### **6b Parents Reference Group Children's Integrated Disability Service (ChIDS) (JT)**

- Set up as a group for parents of children with disabilities who represent other parents
- Meets once a month on the last Wednesday of the month
- Has evolved from the wider 'Aiming High for disabled children' initiative.
- Parent Partnership put in a bid and received £3300 which went on parent participation training for parents who sit on the parent reference group and some members of the forum.
- A grant for £10,000, from the second phase of Aiming High has just been applied for. The parent reference group has been helpful in helping to look at how this money can be spent. This is to include further parent participation training. We should know very soon whether the grant has been accepted.
- At the last meeting, a presentation about the Small Grants Fund was given. This is for parents of children with additional needs disabilities who want to set up groups and want to develop activities for their children and families. A grant application for up to £5000 can be made. The grant applications come to the Parent Reference Group who determines whether it is appropriate for the money to be given to the groups. Copies of a report from the Short Break Project Board small grant fund about the applications that have been submitted and where the money has been spent over the last year will be on the Plymouth Parent Partnership website.
- There has been a request for the meeting times to be moved from evening to daytime.
- We will be looking to consult with parents of children in special schools around an inclusion strategy consultation review in the city.
- Ofsted are carrying out a review of parental confidence in local authorities regarding information that they give to parents of children with additional needs and disabilities.
- Representatives were asked to contact JT or EB or BB if they have parents of children with additional needs/disabilities in their school that might be interested in attending the Parent Reference group.

## **7. AOB**

- PB raised awareness of an all day conference to be held on Friday 18 September 2009, for all Parent Support Advisers in the city. They were asked to mention this to their line managers, who will be invited to the morning session.
- EB attended a Tenor and Health continence open day at Mount Gould Hospital. Feedback was as follows:
  - Tenor have the contract for nappies
  - Parents/carers now have to telephone up to three days before the delivery is due to say that they want the delivery.
  - If a parent/carer forgets to do this, EB has the telephone number of the manager and will make this available to all parents.

## **8. Future Forum Dates (EB)**

Thursday 9 July 2009, 6:30 – 8:30pm at Engage Plymouth, (Carmel Church), Levan's Road. Focus: Social Care or possibly Housing.

Thursday 24 September 2009, 9:30am – 12:00pm at Engage Plymouth, (Carmel Church). Focus: Department for Children, Schools & Families (DCSF) looking at School Admissions and/or Parent Forums.

### **Transport Questions Plymouth Parent and Family Forum 21 May 2009**

1. As a PSA I have been in the position where a single parent was due to have a back operation, therefore laid up in bed for a few weeks. Despite my best efforts I was unable to organise temporary transport to get her son to and from school. I believe that I am not the only PSA who has come across this problem and was wondering if this is an area that needs to be looked at and arrangements for temporary transport be available outside your normal, very hard to hit, criteria?

**Answer:** There is provision within the Social Care part of the Transport Policy for a social worker to apply for transport if they feel that transport is necessary for a 'Child in Need'. It is likely that getting the child to school would only be one of the provisions that need to be made in a case like this, for instance social services would need to ensure there was adequate child care provision put in place for the child and they would therefore be looking at a package of care if this were necessary.

2. If a parent has had an accident and are left incapacitated and they live outside of catchment area can transport be provided for short term?

**See answer 1 above.**

3. A family have one parent severely disabled and the other parent has to have a operation on their foot which they then have to completely stay off their feet for 6 weeks, can they have assistance with transport? 3 children in catchment area.

**See answer 1 above.**

4. My son gets picked up by school transport, a while ago I noticed the bus reversing lights was not working. I informed the driver and he told me they don't have to work. If it is not law surely PCC could make it THEIR law, if you want the contract make sure EVERYTHING ON YOUR BUS IS IN PROPER WORKING ORDER. I am sure this would be looked at IF an accident happened. WHY WAIT!!!

**Answer:** It is PCC policy that all vehicle lights should be working. Vehicle defects are taken very seriously. Our Quality Standards Officer goes out to schools and does spot checks on vehicles. By law the driver of a minibus has to do a walk round check everyday and report any defects in his defect report book. He should then arrange with his operator to have the faults rectified. If a parent or passenger assistant notices any fault that has not been rectified then they should telephone the Quality Standards Officer who will then take this up with the operator as a matter of urgency.

5. Who is responsible for the safety of the kids on the bus?

**Answer:** The parents are responsible for the safety of the children from the house to the bus. Once the pupil is on the bus then Plymouth City Council are responsible. Once the bus reaches school then the school are responsible. This is only for buses which are contracted by Plymouth City Council, it does not cover public service vehicles, where the operator is responsible for the safety of the passengers.

6. Why do kids in wheelchairs have tags for safety yet buses are death traps?

**Answer:** PCC developed the system of placing tags on wheelchairs to ensure the correct restraint system is used on the minibus. All the minibuses have to undergo an annual enhanced MOT test and also the tail lifts have to have a test every 6 months. A walk round check has to be undertaken every day by the driver. We also undertake spot checks ourselves and we also work on joint operations with VOSA and the police to check vehicles.

7. When a bus has been pulled over by police due to un-roadworthiness, why is it back on the road later in the day with our children on it?

**Answer:** If this happens then the operator is given either an immediate prohibition notice or a delayed prohibition notice depending on the severity of the fault. The operator then has to ensure the vehicle is repaired and present it at Agaton Fort test station to get a certificate of road worthiness. If the repair is done immediately then it would be possible for the vehicle to be back on the road the same day.

8. When a bus is constantly breaking down, why is it still used and a replacement not found? This is an inconvenience for children and families.

**Answer:** Obviously breakdowns do occur but where this is happening on a regular basis then we would take this up with the contract holder. The contract could be taken away from the operator if they fail to provide a regular efficient service.

9. I have a parent who has recently moved out of the area due to domestic violence issues, she wants the child to continue attending the school, can she get any help with transport cost and/or provision?"

**Answer:** If the move is to a temporary address pending rehousing, then we can provide transport for up to 12 weeks. This is to prevent the child having to move schools twice. If the move is permanent then if the child is in year 10 or 11 we would provide a free bus pass to enable the pupil to finish their exams. In all other cases transport would be refused, and the parent would be given the right to appeal against the decision. All primary school children can travel at a fare of 60p per single journey

10. A child is going onto secondary school this year (Longcause) and they will be eligible for transport can the parent get support for transition visits as they don't drive and the child (autistic) will not cope with travelling on public transport?

**Answer:** Requests such as this are considered on an individual basis working closely with the specialist staff at the primary school and the receiving school. Transport may be provided if the professionals working with the child deem it necessary. Often teaching assistants within the primary school will arrange to take the child for such transition visits.

11. Can you explain the extended rights for home to school transport regarding faith schools.

**Answer:**

The following 3 criteria must be met:

- a. the child must be attending the nearest faith school to their address
- b. the school must measure more than 2 miles by the shortest safe walking route (accompanied by a parent if necessary)
- c. the family must be eligible for free school meals or in receipt of the maximum award of Working Tax Credit.

12. Can you tell us how many parents have taken up the free transport to faith schools. Under the extended rights that were introduced in 2007/2008.

**Answer:**

St Boniface – 10  
Notre Dame – 13  
St Peters – 2  
Holy Cross - 1

13. Is the transport department under pressure to reduce the amount of money spent on transport and is this to the detriment of children that need it. I have noticed that when children change school and move onto secondary school transport does not normally follow why is this?

**Answer:** We are not under pressure to reduce the amount spent on transport, however we must provide an efficient service and not waste resources. Safety of the children is paramount and we must ensure that we are providing a safe and efficient service. Every pupil is individually assessed in accordance with the policy to see if transport is required.

When a child moves school a new transport assessment is completed to ascertain whether transport is still required or not.