

**Forum Meeting
Thursday 25 March 2010
Plymstock school
18.00 – 20.00pm**

1. Introductions and Welcome

EB welcomed parent representatives. The focus of this forum was housing and housing benefits.

2. Ofsted Feedback

MC, Assistant Director, Learner & Family Support gave feedback regarding the recent Ofsted Inspection of the Children's Trust, 8 – 19 March 2010.

- The focus was on Safeguarding and Looked After Children and Young People.
- Six inspectors looked at children who are subject to child protection, anti-bullying, safe staff, exclusions, education of children not in school and Looked After Children.
- Inspectors were interested in how safe children and young people are and how safe children and young people feel. They were also interested in looking at partnership working, leadership and management, ambition, priorities in the city and user engagement ie how well the city engaged users in what they do.
- Verbal feedback on thirty-three judgements was provided on 19 March 2010. The written report will be available towards the end of April.
- MC thanked, on behalf of the Children's Trust, everyone who had been involved in the inspection process.
- In response to a question asking where children and parents (who had been interviewed by the inspectors) had come from, MC replied that children were interviewed from a range of places including: Routeways (through the participation workers), the Youth Service (through the participation workers), schools with children with disabilities eg Woodlands, a secondary and primary school, the Excellence Cluster. and the Listening in Care council re looked after children. Plymouth Parent Partnership facilitated several of the groups of parents. Parents were also interviewed from the schools inspectors visited. Parents were also met at Children's centres.

3. Forum Activities

Forums:

- In November 2009 a disabilities forum was held. 52 questions requiring in-depth answers will appear on Plymouth Parent Partnership website by the weekend.
- The answers will be available on a guestbook part of the website where parent representatives will be able to register and leave comments on the guestbook.

- The parent's group from Downham School produced 21 questions. BB will return to Downham to continue answering these questions.
- Ten questions were produced at the last Parent and Family Forum:
 - In response to when is the best time to hold the Forum, the working group decided that it would be best to hold two daytime Forums, followed by an evening one ie evening forums will be held in January 2010, September 2010 and March 2011.
 - In response to suitable venues where Forums could be held, suggestions are still being looked at.
 - In response to opening the Forum to parents, the working group decided that parent representatives are able to invite parents, rather than parents turning up. This will be reviewed on an annual basis.
 - In response to how the Forum could be improved the following suggestions were offered:
 - i) Better microphones. This is being looked at.
 - ii) Car parks. Forum organisers do try to find venues with suitable parking.
 - iii) In response to comments that the Forum seems to be centred around disabilities and additional needs, BB agreed that in part, this is the case, although the Aiming High Parent Reference Group is more involved in this and meets on the last Wednesday of each month. BB stated that disabilities and additional needs are an important subject.
 - In response to a request for contact numbers for presenters to be available, every presentation is uploaded to the Plymouth Parent Partnership website. Contact details are available on these presentations or can be noted down at the Parent & Family Forum.
 - In response to comments that there is not enough time allowed for questions, the Forum is very popular. An additional Forum will be held in June 2010, instead of the normal two-monthly Forum. If anyone has a question and sends it in advance to the Forum, there is a good chance it will be answered. Also, 'parking lots' where questions can be placed on post-its, will be available at each Forum.

Children's Trust Board (EB)

- The last one related to Ofsted and concentrated on updating the Young People's Plan

Aiming High for Disabled Children (AHDC) Parent Reference Group (CP)

- Will meet on Wednesday 31 March 2010, 12:00 – 14:00 and 18:00 – 20:00.
- Contact Parent Partnership if you would like to attend. Jo Siney, Manager of Integrated Disability Service, will provide feedback.

AHDC Parent Participation:

- Phase 2 is completed.
- Phase 3 monies (£10,000) has been received.
- Funding will be used for training, childcare and transport costs, parents' costs for attending the Forum, Reference groups, working groups.
- If you know of any parents who would be interested in helping to affect change, please ask them to get in touch.

Video teleconferencing:

- Will be tried out this week.
- Allows parents unable to attend, to join in meetings.
- Some of the Aiming High money has been spent on a texting service. Parents eg at the Parent Reference Group, will be asked what type of information they would like to receive by text.

The Mental Health Reference Group will meet on Tuesday 29 March 2010.

4. Julie Hahn, Team Leader and Kevin Neil, Housing Needs Team Leader gave a presentation about Housing. (See presentation on PPP website)

Questions regarding Housing policy and general principles:

1. Regarding the demolition of properties at North Prospect:

Ans:

- This is being dealt with by Plymouth Community Homes. A leaflet detailing how the major development of North Prospect will take place will be posted on Plymouth Parent Website. The Housing department will be working as enablers to ensure a smooth running of the situation.

2. Regarding the responsibilities a private landlord has to repairs:

Ans:

- It is the landlord's responsibility to repair the property and the client's responsibility to notify the landlord of any form of disrepair.
- In the event that this does not happen, there is a specific team 'Renewals', based at Windsor House. They can send out an officer to assess the property. There are certain channels that can be followed if a landlord is not accepting his/her responsibility.
- If a client has caused damage, the client is responsible.
- If a tenant is living in a private tenancy with high disrepair (Category One Hazard) which cannot be rectified within a reasonable time scale, Renewals team will notify Housing Needs and if that person is an applicant they will be placed into band B (high housing need) which will provide them with an opportunity to access alternative housing. If the landlord repairs the fault, Band B will be removed.

3. Regarding removal of a partner's name from the tenancy if one of the partners moves away- can the name be removed from the tenancy? :

Ans:

- The name cannot be removed from the tenancy as there are rules regarding this.
- In certain circumstances the termination of the joint tenancy can take place and the tenancy reinstated in one person's name. However this may cause problems at a later date if the second person returns and says it was their tenancy.

4. Regarding a person who is not from this country but has lived here for more than 20 years and experiences a relationship breakdown.

Ans:

- The first thing to establish would be to get them recognised as a British citizen in order to signpost them to the relevant department to ensure they are claiming benefits and entitlements.

Devon Home Choice Policy can be found on Devon Home Choice webpage www.devonhomechoice.com

5. Regarding Band A families ie very high risk eg domestic abuse. You say there are 31 families out of 8000 but is there really only this number? The family may have fled but they have to go to a public place eg a library or school, to register their interest in property as their application has to be made by internet.

Ans:

- We are learning to become as accessible as possible. The Devon Home Base register is a web-based product but we have paper forms and links with Plymouth Domestic Abuse Services (PDAS). This provides an opportunity to contact us informally.
- It is a small number because once on Band A, families tend to get housed almost immediately and do not stay on the register for long.

6. A parent has been made homeless. They have been offered a deposit via Pathways but are struggling to find a landlord to accept the deposit.

Speak to us at the end of the evening, we need to make (the parent) an appointment with a Housing Adviser. We do have a list of letting agencies we work with and have a particularly good relationship with 'Plymouth Homes to Let'.

7. Regarding joint tenancy and the break up of a relationship. If the person that leaves declares themselves homeless, do you have to investigate whether or not they were on a joint tenancy before you can rehouse them?

- We have to look at the last set of addresses, sometimes back to the third address. We look at the reasons why the tenancy has broken down. We try to negotiate to have the tenancy transferred over. It is based on an individual case. We can negotiate with the landlord.
- The tenancy law is a complex area and if someone has a joint tenancy with someone who is no longer there, they are advised to speak to their

landlord initially, or Housing Advice Team at Midland House or Devonport Advice or Shelter.

8. A family rent from a private landlord. The landlord is returning (to the area) and has given a month's notice on the house. The family is finding it difficult to find anywhere to rent and have two weeks of the tenancy left. Will the family have to be split up? They would prefer to stay in the area they currently live.
We would not split up the family. The family needs to make contact with the Housing Advice Centre now, without waiting until the end of the tenancy, with a copy of the notice. A month's notice may not be a valid notice. The tenant will have to move, but in a controlled, planned and orderly way.

9. A tenant lives in a two bedroom flat and their neighbours complain about noise. The tenant has been subject to physical and verbal abuse and the police have been involved. The family has been affected by this. They have been advised by the housing officer to keep a diary. How much more can they take?

This is a complex case with many factors to take into account eg health issues and the development of a small child, housing officer and police involvement. Often, there is not an easy solution to this. Speak to us after the meeting and we can get in touch with the tenant to make sure that all of the options that might help the tenant are in place.

The tenant is doing the right thing. It is really important that a diary is kept.

5. Housing Benefits. A Presentation was given by Sarah Yardley, Business Support and Development Manager. sarah.yardley@plymouth.gov.uk

- The basics of housing benefits were covered (see presentation on PPP website)
- Contact details: 01752 668000
www.plymouth.gov.uk
or call into the Civic Centre, Plymouth.

Questions re Housing Benefits:

1. I understand that after 11 April, maintenance will not affect Income Support. Will (maintenance) affect Housing Benefit?

Ans:

- Maintenance that someone would receive in respect of a child is no longer included in Housing Benefit calculations. That regulation changed in October 2009. So any maintenance received in respect of a child with a property is disregarded in full now.
- Maintenance may have an affect on Income Support and if a person is no longer entitled to Income Support, that may have an affect on Housing Benefits but maintenance solely on its own in the Housing Benefit calculation would have no affect on at all.
- If a person loses their Income Support, any other income coming into the household would be used to assess the person's benefit. It is likely that the client will still be entitled to Housing Benefit.

2. How can people on Housing Benefit have rent arrears?

- Housing Benefit is paid to the tenant unless the tenant fits a vulnerability criteria or has rent arrears
- If anyone (eg parent representatives) knows tenants in private accommodation where Housing Benefit is paying the rent to them but the tenant is unable to manage their financial affairs, let Housing Benefit know. (Information will not be accepted from landlords, only from certain groups of people). Then, payments can be directed to the landlord.

3. Why does the payment not go directly to the landlord?

- The government have brought Housing Benefit in line with Income Support where payment goes directly to the person who is in receipt of it. The government are encouraging people to manage their own financial affairs.
- It is only a very small minority of people who do not pay their rent.

4. Is there anything done about people who deliberately do not pay their rent arrears eg if a family constantly move?

- We would not know unless we are told by a previous landlord. If we know that there are previous rent arrears, we will arrange to pay the new landlord direct. Landlords should also take references from previous landlords.

6. AOB

- If anyone is having problems accessing Plymouth Parent Partnership (PPP) members' area, please phone 01752 258933 and ask to speak to BB or SD.
- Any answers to questions left on post-its will be posted on PPP website.

7. Next Forum

The next Forum will be held on Tuesday 18 May 2010, 09.00 – 11.30 at Welcome Hall, Devonport.

- The theme will be 'Services'.
- Parents may accompany Parent Representatives.
- A room will be provided for child care. Please let BB know in advance.