

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

22 OCTOBER 2020

QUESTION 1 in accordance with Standing Order No.36

Councillor White to ask the Chair of the Committee:

Setting up Covid Positive Care Homes

It has been reported in the news that Council's have been instructed to set up dedicated Covid-positive care homes in an effort to keep patients discharged from hospitals with Covid-19 from spreading the virus more widely, as happened in the first wave of the pandemic. Please can my Green Party colleagues and I be updated on work to set up Covid-positive care homes in the Reading area.

REPLY by the Chair of the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee:

I invite Councillor Jones, the Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by Councillor Jones, Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care:

Reading council will not be complying with the government instruction to identify care homes where Covid-19 positive patients can be discharged from hospital.

We fundamentally disagree that this is the best approach for those patients or, indeed, for existing care home residents.

The Executive Director of Social Care and Health along with every other Director in the county, received two letters dated 12th and 13th October 2020, from the Department of Health & Social Care, setting out a requirement to:

- (1) Identify care homes referred to as "designated settings" for people who are COVID19 positive when requiring discharge from hospital, pending completion of social isolation.
- (2) Work with Care Quality Commission to ensure compliance with standards in line with the Infection Control Inspection process following identification of care homes in Reading who can meet this need.

In Reading we consider that it is not acceptable nor reasonable to ask care homes to take new admissions of patients who are tested positive for COVID19 and are potentially infectious.

Our position is based on our experiences earlier in the pandemic, which have left many care settings very worn down with the impact that this has

had for the residents and their families. Most of the care homes in Reading would struggle to convert their premises to accommodate safely such patients without this affecting their ability to care for others.

Instead, we in Reading, along with our Local Authority Berkshire West colleagues, are working with health partners on the basis of the "Home First" principle as the most appropriate way to encourage independence and well-being for our residents and to support them receive the care they require safely until they have completed their isolation or tested negative for COVID19.

We are also disappointed that the requirement for these arrangements is placed upon the council's Executive Director, yet the funding for this is allocated to health partners. This makes no sense.

However, we remain committed to working with the DHSC and CQC to provide the best available care for some of the most vulnerable people in our town.

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ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

22 OCTOBER 2020

QUESTION 2 in accordance with Standing Order No.36

Councillor White to ask the Chair of the Committee:

Impact of Covid on Looked After Children

What has the impact of Covid been on the outcomes for Looked After Children in Reading especially during the lockdown. My Green Party colleagues and I are particularly concerned about the mental health impacts. What lessons have been learnt for the coming second lockdown ?

REPLY by the Chair of the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee:

I invite Councillor Terry, the Lead Councillor for Children to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by Councillor Terry, Lead Councillor for Children:

Context

Our service supported over 289 children in care during the height of lockdown - this has now reduced to 277, as we continue to make sure all their living arrangements are the best they deserve. We are also supporting a further 135 Care Leavers who are 18+. Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic we have continued to visit our young people in line with a risk assessment process which considers our children and young peoples' wider circumstances, risk and needs.

For many, our visits have been virtual, for others weekly visits have been face to face. We have learnt from some older care leavers that they liked the frequency and ease the virtual arrangements gave them. Changes in our IT capability to integrate both virtual and face to face visiting has the potential to offer a more creative way of spending increased time with our young people.

Contact

National restrictions for some young people changed the way they maintained contact with family members which for some moved from face to face to virtual contacts for a period of time and is now reverting. We know that for some young people whilst they need to maintain these relationships these can be difficult face to face and the ability to use virtual contact is a good means to keep in contact.

Attainment and Progress in Education

Covid-19 has resulted in some young people having disruption to formalised learning within the school environment and the social context of the school curriculum. Some young people whilst offered continued school placement wished to have home learning as they told us going to school makes them different to their friends. Home learning has been provided by carers and placement providers.

Support for all children looked after was critical at this time but particularly for children looked after with an identified special educational need and education, health care plan.

The Virtual School continued to track attainment and progress through personal education plans and feedback at virtual PEP meetings. There were some creditable individual achievements at KS4 and three KS5 students gained places at University and continue to receive support.

The Virtual School determinedly advocated for children looked after and if there were queries regarding exam gradings or acceptance onto courses these were challenged.

The PEP completion rate during the lockdown period in the summer term was 100%

Pupil Premium Plus funding, requested through the PEP process, continued to support a range of targeted interventions for children. Over £100,000 of Pupil Premium Plus funding was allocated to support children's learning and emotional health and well-being.

All year six children were provided with a Virtual School transition booklet and support was offered to children looked after and carers by the Virtual School Education Support Worker to prepare them for secondary school.

There were no permanent or fixed term exclusions of children looked after during the summer term.

Living arrangements

As corporate parents we have made arrangements to financially support the housing needs of older young people to prevent any unnecessary accommodation changes. We have been supported by fostering providers to increase collective oversight and maintain placement stability.

Emotional Health and Wellbeing

The emotional and mental health needs of all our young people is a fundamental priority. Their continued developmental and learning and social skills are closely linked to emotional stability and the achievements they attain. We know that due to trauma associated with being cared for away from parents, many of our young people have increased attachment and emotional needs. The added pressure of a pandemic for some young people continues to increase the concern they feel for separated family and themselves.

Social workers and other practitioners are able to seek advice and support through the emotional health and well-being multi agency meetings that are in place.

Kooth, is a company, offering emotional and mental health support for children and young people aged between 11 - 24 years and is available up to 10pm every day. This service was launched for Reading children and young people over the Summer.

In relation to the Virtual School, the Strengths, Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is an important tool which can serve as an indicator of the level of children's emotional health and well-being. This has been particularly important during this period and Social Workers continued to receive support from the Virtual School's Educational Psychologist in the SDQ process, indicators and analysis. The Virtual School Educational Psychologist has continued to complete assessment's which have informed and supported the delivery of targeted interventions funded via Pupil Premium Plus funding and which has also served as evidence towards requests for statutory assessment. Support on attachment and developmental trauma has been offered to Foster Carers, Social Workers, Designated Teachers and schools along with the promotion of therapeutic thinking approaches to support children's emotional health and well-being.

Learning

- We have learnt that many older care leavers have demonstrated maturity and insight to wanting to keep themselves and those around them safe and have taken guidance with positive action.
- In working with our health colleagues, we continue to develop a service that can respond to the changing health needs. Over the period of the first national restrictions there has been no immediate health crisis and interventions for young people such as escalation in CAMHS referrals or immediate concerns for mental health.
- What is evident is that we are likely to see an impact over time to young peoples' experiences and potentially anxiety becoming more prevalent.
- If there were to be a second lockdown Virtual School systems are in place to continue to promote the educational achievement of children looked after.
- Our children, young people, carers and staff have coped incredibly well under difficult and unprecedented services - we are proud of them all.