

Report to: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date of meeting: 22 April 2016

By: Director of Children's Services

Title: Safeguarding concerns for young people in Secure Training Centres

Purpose: To update panel members in the context of the concerns which surfaced in the recent Panorama programme about the experience of young people in the Medway Secure Training Centre

RECOMMENDATION

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the action that has been taken at both a local and national level to safeguard vulnerable Looked After Children who are remanded or sentenced to secure establishments via a criminal court

1. Background Information

1.1 Medway Secure Training Centre (STC) is currently run by G4S and is commissioned by the Youth Justice Board (YJB) to provide secure accommodation for young people, either serving custodial sentences or on remand. Medway STC is situated in Chatham and caters for both girls and boys aged 12 – 17 years. It can accommodate up to 76 young people at any one time. The young people placed in STCs have been assessed as being more vulnerable than those placed in Young Offender Institutions (YOIs), either due to their age or other factors such as emotional and mental health concerns.

1.2 Medway is the local STC for East Sussex and therefore young people that meet the needs for a STC are most likely to be placed there. This equates to very small numbers. Last year there was 12 young people sentenced to custody and nine remanded in East Sussex. Four of these were placed in STCs, three of these in Medway. When children and young people are remanded to custody they become Looked After by the local authority and subject to oversight via that legislative framework in addition to Youth Offending Team (YOT) staff input.

2. Supporting Information

Safeguarding concerns

2.1 A number of concerns regarding the treatment of young people placed in Medway STC were exposed in a BBC Panorama programme, aired on 11 January 2016. The programme involved coverage filmed by an undercover investigator, which showed evidence of children and young people being bullied and abused by staff in Medway STC.

2.2 Since the programme was broadcast, five G4S staff members have been dismissed, and three more are suspended (as well as one person employed by the local healthcare provider) whilst a police investigation into the allegations is carried out. Police have arrested and bailed five men. Four of the men were arrested on suspicion of child neglect. A fifth person was held on suspicion of assault. The police investigation is ongoing.

2.3 There was only one young person from East Sussex placed in Medway STC during the period in which the filming for the programme took place. This young person was not involved in any of the incidents and has been asked explicitly but has not reported any concerns. Another young person from East Sussex has made allegations since the programme has been aired. These allegations are being investigated through the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) in Medway and via the Police. East Sussex Children's Services and YOT have supported this investigation.

National response

2.4 The YJB took immediate action to ensure that all children at Medway and in the other STCs are safe and supported. YJB monitoring of the establishment has been increased. There have been several visits from Ofsted, HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) and the Office of the Children's Commissioner since the concerns were raised. Barnardo's have provided independent advocates for six days a week, working with children to voice any concerns or worries they might have. None of these agencies have identified any immediate safeguarding concerns. This view is supported by the findings of our enhanced monitoring activity, which has not uncovered any new evidence of staff misconduct or inappropriate practice.

2.5 The YJB stopped placing young people in Medway immediately after the concerns were raised. They have recently begun to place some individuals again. This will be done with the consultation of the local YOT and with the family of the young person and where it is in the best interests of the young person. There have been no young people from East Sussex placed in a STC since these issues were raised.

2.6 Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Justice, has appointed an Independent Improvement Board comprising four members with substantial expertise in education, running secure establishments and looking after children with behavioural difficulties. This Board will fulfil the same function, with the same remit, as HMIP and Ofsted's recommendation for a commissioner. They have tasked G4S with putting an improvement plan in place, which this Board will oversee. We are currently waiting on the report from this Board.

Local response

2.7 There is a South of the Thames Resettlement Group which consists of Heads of Service/YOT Managers, Managers from the secure estate and from the YJB. The main remit of this group is to identify how we can best support and develop, through care and resettlement arrangements, young people across the region.

2.8 The major concern is that the current systems for children to alert the appropriate authorities to issues such as abuse or mistreatment were not used by the young people themselves and that the allegations, which have resulted in an ongoing criminal investigation, were identified by the TV programme. We are working to identify what could be done differently in future. The main aim is to ensure that young people placed in any custodial institution are made aware that this treatment and behaviour is not acceptable; that they are aware of and have confidence in the processes to report any concerns and that they are confident that we will continue to ensure that they are kept safe and feel safe

following any allegations made. It is important that this is a more general discussion than just being related to Medway STC.

2.9 To ensure that this discussion takes place with our local young people in the STCs, East Sussex will continue to support young people in custody throughout their sentences. The YOT Case managers will insist on having the opportunity to meet with young people without the secure estate staff present where possible. YOT workers will chair the placement meetings and continue to ensure that the young person's wellbeing is covered. Support will also be given to the parents/carers of those young people receiving custodial sentences.

3. Conclusion

3.1 The experience of some young people at Medway STC was not acceptable. It is concerning that it did not come to light via any 'normal' process. Local use of Medway STC is not great and numbers of young people placed there are small.

3.2 One local young person has disclosed information about his time in Medway which is now being investigated and he is being supported with this by local staff.

3.3 The national response to these concerns has been swift and robust.

3.4 Locally the focus on the experience of young people in any secure establishment has been strengthened and this will continue going forward.

3.5 The Panel is recommended to note the action that has been taken at both a local and national level to safeguard vulnerable LAC who are remanded or sentenced to secure establishments via a criminal court.

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Local Members: All

Background Documents: None