

News story: Education Secretary visits Hampshire children's social services

Education Secretary Damian Hinds met with staff at Hampshire children's social services today (Friday 9 March) to hear about innovative ways of providing support for vulnerable children and families.

Joining the Chief Social Worker Isabelle Trowler on the visit to Winchester, the Education Secretary met Hampshire County Council Chief Executive John Coughlan, the Director of Children's Services, Councillors and social workers to hear how they are driving improvements through the Department's Partners in Practice Programme and their Innovation Programme projects.

As a Partner in Practice, Hampshire – which is rated 'good' by Ofsted with 'outstanding' features – works with a number of other children's services in the region to improve practice and management.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

Social workers are the heroes, often unsung, of our society. We want every child to have a happy and safe childhood and social workers play a vital role in transforming the lives of some of our most disadvantaged children. I was pleased to see the innovative work being done here in Hampshire to improve support for families in need of additional help.

Through initiatives like Partners in Practice and the Innovation Programme we want to help councils like Hampshire develop new and effective ways of making a real difference to children's lives.

Hampshire has also received £3.96 million from the department's £200 million Children's Social Care Innovation Programme, for their project Active Agents for Change to improve support for families affected by issues such as domestic abuse, substance abuse or mental health concerns.

The Active Agents for Change project is training volunteers to mentor children and young people who may be in need of care, and find other ways to increase social workers' direct contact time with families.

These measures resulted in direct contact time with families increasing from 34 per cent to 58 per cent, and engagement with families with complex needs from 29 per cent to 70 per cent in the first year of the project.

Hampshire will also receive funding through the Fair Ways and Portsmouth Staying Close pilots, backed by £467k and £624,400 respectively, which support young people leaving residential care.

Chief Social Worker Isabelle Trowler said:

It's been so inspiring today to see how social workers are working hard to turn back the tide towards family support and reunification. I am pleased to see the confident and skilled practice at play here.

Hampshire County Council's Executive Lead Member for Children's Services, Councillor Keith Mans, said:

We were extremely pleased and honoured to welcome the Secretary of State and the Chief Social Worker to the County Council and for the opportunity to explain and discuss Hampshire's model for children's social care practice. We took the opportunity to demonstrate the progress of the Partners in Practice work that we are undertaking, to further improve on what we do to achieve the best outcomes possible for vulnerable children.