

**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL
7 SEPTEMBER 2023**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR S P ROE (CHAIRMAN)

Lincolnshire County Council: Councillors A G Hagues (Vice-Chairman), C Matthews, N Sear and M A Whittington.

Added Members: Polly Coombes (Foster Carer), Ann Wright (Foster Carer) and Elizabeth Bunney (Lincolnshire Community Health Services).

Officers in attendance:-

Andrew Morris (Head of Service - Leaving Care, Semi-Independent Living and Unaccompanied Children), Amy Allcock (Commissioning Manager – Commercial), Nicola Brangam (Fostering Team Manager South), Katrina Cope (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Deborah Crawford (Head of Service - Fostering and Adoption), Bridie Fletcher (Senior Commissioning Officer – Children’s Strategic Commissioning), Charlotte Gray (Head of Service – Children’s Strategic Commissioning), Tracy Johnson (Senior Scrutiny Officer), Carolyn Knight (Head of Service - Quality and Standards and Principal Social Worker), Sarah Lane (Virtual School Team Manager), Emily McAllister (Fostering Team Manager), Lynda Whitton (Senior Commissioning Officer – Children’s Commissioning) and Sharon Clarke (Interim Team Manager, Adoption).

12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mrs J E Killey.

Apologies for absence were also received from Councillor Mrs P A Bradwell OBE, Executive Councillor for Children’s Services, Community Safety, Procurement and Migration and Tara Jones, Assistant Director – Children’s Safeguarding.

13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Declarations of Members’ Interest were received.

14 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 6 JULY 2023

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Panel meeting held on 6 July 2023 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

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15 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLORS AND CHIEF OFFICERS

The Chairman advised the Committee that he and Andrew Morris, Head of Service for Leaving Care, Supported Living and Unaccompanied Children had conducted a Corporate Parenting training event for North Kesteven District Council via Teams, which had proven to be very successful. The Chairman extended his thanks to the Head of Service for Leaving Care, Supported Living and Unaccompanied Children for his help in this regard.

No Senior Officer announcements were received.

16 THE MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS AND SUPPORT AVAILABLE FOR CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS IN LINCOLNSHIRE

Consideration was given to a report from Charlotte Gray, Head of Service – Children’s Strategic Commissioning and Lynda Whitton, Senior Commissioning Officer – Children’s Commissioning, which outlined the various universal and targeted mental health support available for Children in Care and Care Leavers in Lincolnshire.

Reference was made to: the local authority’s responsibilities; the Children and Young People Mental Health Services in Lincolnshire and specific enhancements for Children in Care and Care Leavers including faster access to services; the Complex Needs Service; Children in Care Link Workers and Residential Care Home Support; Barnardo’s Leaving Care Mental Health Practitioner; and future developments around Mental Health Support for Children in Care and Care Leavers.

During discussion thereon, the following comments were noted:

- The Panel was advised that there had been a significant increase in the number of referrals to children’s mental health services since the pandemic and there had also been quite a high turnover of staff. This capacity issue had resulted in longer waiting times to services and the four-week target for Children in Care not being achieved. However, reassurance was given that Children in Care were still being prioritized. It was however highlighted that Lincolnshire Partnership Foundation NHS Trust (LPFT) as a health service had to ensure that those that mostly urgently needed help received it as a priority. It was highlighted that NHS Lincolnshire Integrated Care Board had invested an additional £1.2 million recurrently into CAMHS to support increased demand. The Panel noted that by the end of March 2024 the service should be back on target according to current trajectory;
- The Panel was advised that the two residential children’s homes that were in the process of being brought into service were located in Louth and Lincoln;
- It was reported that Mental Health Support Teams in Lincoln, Gainsborough, Boston and South Holland were now established and that further waves would be coming online, Skegness and Boston from September 2025; Spalding from 2023; Grantham

and Sleaford from January 2024; and Lincoln South and North Kesteven from January 2025; and

- The Panel was advised that although there had been an increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Lincolnshire, this had not impacted the service. It was however highlighted that this matter was being looked at as part of the Transformation Programme. Confirmation was also given that LPFT did use the translation service and that where possible they tried to have a workforce that was representative.

The Chairman on behalf of the Panel extended his thanks to the presenters.

RESOLVED

That following review of the report presented, assurance be received of the universal and targeted mental health support available for Children in Care and Care Leavers in Lincolnshire.

17 CHILDREN IN CARE PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 1

Consideration was given to a report from Carolyn Knight, Head of Service – Quality and Standards and Principal Social Worker, which invited the Panel to consider and comment on the key performance information for Quarter 1 2023/24 which was relevant to the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

It was reported that of the 15 measures relating to Children in Care reported on in Quarter 1, four of the measures had not met their target, and one measure was ahead of the target set by the service. Appendix A to the report provided details of all the Children in Care performance measures for Quarter 1 for the Panel to consider.

During discussion thereon, the following points were raised:

- The Panel noted that there were percentage figures available relating to the number of unaccompanied young people seeking asylum that had refused health checks. It was highlighted that these figures were not available at the meeting, however, officers agreed to circulate some information to members of the Panel after the meeting. The Committee noted that in terms of Children in Care, the number of unaccompanied young people coming into the service, 88% of them were aged between 16 and 17 years old, as age assessed.
- The Panel noted that it was a right of a young person to refuse a health check;
- Thanks were extended from a member of the Panel to the team for their quick response to a family breakdown incident within their division;
- Confirmation was given that currently the authority had 79 unaccompanied young asylum seekers in care currently (against 747 Children in Care). There was recognition that the number had increased by 50 % in the last year. The Panel noted that there was also an element of homelessness presentation in the 16/17-year-olds cohort, which the authority also had a duty to offer accommodation to;

- Some concern was expressed regarding the number of 16–17-year-old Children in Care participating in Learning, as the target for Quarter 1 had not been met, and whether this was likely to cause any anti-social issues in the future. Further concern was expressed that the increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people aged 16-17 was having an impact on the performance figures. The Panel noted that the issue of non-participation in EET for all children in care and care leavers was not just a Lincolnshire issue, it was a national challenge as well. The Panel was advised that a lot of the 16-year-old unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people had been placed in Peterborough, but unfortunately schools admissions did not always allow for admissions in the summer term, so because of GCSE, A-level exams and study leave school admissions actually closed in Peterborough for any school places for those of statutory schools age. So, for those young people the pupil premium had been used to secure some English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision. It was noted that most of those young people had now secured places in post 16 qualifications and courses at colleges. It was highlighted that the number of courses were limited, and where courses were running at full capacity, the pupil premium was being used to put alternatives in place, which would not give evidence that the young person was accessing education as they were not on the roll of a school or college. Reassurance was given that the non-participation was as a result of when the young person had come into care and what capacity was available at that time, rather than the young person not being willing to learn. It was noted that some analysis had highlighted that the thirst for education for unaccompanied young people had outweighed some of Lincolnshire's other young people in care;
- Some clarification was provided as to the age assessment process;
- The Panel noted that young people coming into the country were on the national transfer scheme which was imposed by the Home Office. It was noted further that the authority was funded £148 a day from the Home Office to meet their needs, and that was why the authority was able to support them;
- It was reported that the number of Children in Care cohort of unaccompanied young people did not remain static, it was therefore felt that the 16–17-year-old Children in Care who were participating in the learning target would remain a challenge until the national transfer scheme response changed;
- The role of the virtual school was a coordinating role, not to provide education;
- Reassurance was provided that commissioned online provision was providing learning for young people, and that providers had provided a summer programme for Children in Care. The Virtual school ensured that learning was tailored to meet the young people's needs, and that work was done with carers through their personal education plan to look at what was appropriate for them; and
- That officers would provide further performance information concerning the 16–17-year-old Children in Care who were participating in learning performance indicator, in relation to details pertaining to unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people and Lincolnshire Children in Care.

The Chairman on behalf of the Panel extended his thanks to the presenter.

RESOLVED

1. That the Children in Care Performance Report for Quarter 1 as presented be received and that the comments/actions raised by the Panel be taken into consideration by the Executive Councillor for Children's Services, Community Safety, Procurement and Migration.
2. That further information be received concerning the 16–17-year-old Children in Care who are participating in learning performance indicator, in relation to details pertaining to unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people and Lincolnshire Children in Care.

18 OFSTED INSPECTION OF LINCOLNSHIRE CHILDREN'S SERVICES - OUTCOME REPORT

A report was received from Carolyn Knight, Head of Service – Quality and Standards and Principal Social Worker, which invited the Panel to review the findings and judgements from the Ofsted Inspection of Lincolnshire Children's Service in April 2023.

Appendix A to the report provided a copy of the Ofsted report. It was reported that the judgement had concluded that Lincolnshire continued to provide outstanding services for vulnerable children and their families. The report also highlighted that there was more work to do regarding the care leavers offer to bring them to the same consistently high standards as children in other service areas received. The two areas for improvement were:

- The quality and consistency of planning and case records for care leavers; and
- The offer to care-experienced young people aged 21 and over.

During consideration of this item, the following points were noted:

- Thanks were extended to all staff in Children's Services for the overall judgement of 'Outstanding';
- Confirmation was given that an update report on the Ofsted Inspection outcomes including an Improvement Plan would be considered by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee at its March 2024 meeting;
- That lots of planning and scoping was being undertaken to identify what a new service for 2025 might look like; and
- Reassurance was given that the authority was looking to re-commission the care leavers service by way of a tender process and that Barnardo's would have the opportunity to bid for the service along with other interested parties.

The Chairman extended his thanks to the presenter for the report.

RESOLVED

That the Ofsted Inspection outcomes presented be received and that congratulations be extended to staff in Children's Services for the overall judgement of 'Outstanding'.

19 CHILDREN IN CARE SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY 2023-2027

Consideration was given to a report from Bridie Fletcher, Senior Commissioning Officer – Children’s Commissioning and Amy Allcock, Commissioning Manager – Commercial, which invited the Panel to consider and endorse the Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy 2023-2027, a copy of which was attached at Appendix A to the report presented.

During consideration of this item, the following comments were noted:

- Thanks were extended to officers for an excellent report;
- The Panel was advised that the service would always try to match any children that required accommodation within inhouse provision first, but where there was need to look at a placing in the independent market, the service always tried to ensure that the placing was as close to Lincolnshire as possible, so that the young person was able to access Lincolnshire services. It was highlighted that independent provision was used in the most complex cases of need. It was highlighted that as part of the Children in Care Transformation Programme it was hoped that many of the children out of county would be brought back into Lincolnshire when the time was right for them. The Panel noted that by working closely with providers in the independent sector, the Authority was aiming to provide high quality placements for Lincolnshire young people that were closer to home and their communities. It was noted further that time was being taken by commissioning to look at trends of young people coming into care to identify what the needs were locally, to then build up those needs in Lincolnshire, to prevent the young people having to be place out of county; and
- The Panel was advised that two children would be moving into the Lincoln children’s home shortly, and that it was hoped that the Louth children’s home would be ready for January 2024;

The Chairman on behalf of the Panel extended thanks to the presenters.

RESOLVED

1. That the Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy 2023-2027 and Appendices A1 (Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy Action Plan) and A2 (Market Position Statement 2023-2024) be endorsed.
2. That the online publication of the Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy 2023-2027 and Appendices A 1 and A2 be endorsed.
3. That an annual presentation of the update of the Children in Care Action Plan (Appendix A1) be agreed, prior to publication online, with the first update in May 2024.

20 ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023

Consideration was given to a report from Sharon Clarke, Interim Team Manager – Adoption, which invited the Panel to consider the annual report which set out relevant performance information and identified key developments within the service during the previous twelve-month period.

Note: Councillor M A Whittington left the meeting at 11:40am.

A copy of the Adoption Annual Report for 2022 –2023 was provided in Appendix A to the report.

The Committee noted the following: that more older children had been placed; that through creative marketing, the service had managed to recruit adopters, however, it was noted that there was a national decrease in the number of people applying to adopt; there had been an increase in the number of referrals to the service; the number of special guardianship orders had increased; the challenges around timescales for children in care as a result care proceedings taking longer; and the challenges for the service going forward.

During discussion, the following points were noted:

- The Panel was advised that information was gathered from adoptees on a regular basis as to what they liked or did not like about the adoption process. Reference was also made to a group of adoptees ‘Collaborate’ who also provided feedback which would help shape the service going forward;
- It was also reported that feedback was also received via the Adopter Hub, and that this feedback helped to shape further training needs for adopters;
- The process taken should a foster carer decide to become an adopter;
- The Panel noted that generally conversion rates had been good, however, there had been a slight dip locally and nationally. It was thought the dip could be because of the burden of the financial crisis. It was reported that strategies were in place to help the situation; and
- Confirmation was provided that the appeals received by the service were from natural parents.

The Chairman extended his thanks to the presenter.

RESOLVED

That the Adoption Annual Report for 2022 – 2023 be received and endorsed.

21 FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023

Consideration was given to a report from Emily McAllister, Fostering Team Manager and Nicola Brangam, Fostering Team Manager-South, which invited the Panel to consider the Fostering Annual report for 2022-2023, a copy of which was provided in Appendix A to the report.

The Panel noted the following: that of the 723 children and young people in care, 488 of those children and young people had been placed in foster care; that 24% of the young people had been placed within their own kinship network; at the end of the financial year 288 foster care households had been approved and registered; that fostering retention was a priority as thirty one fostering households had been lost by the service during the year; of thirty five registrations of interest received, thirty had been converted into being fostering households; the role of advertising and social media in the recruitment campaign for foster carers; eleven fostering households had been approved for permanence; forty five care leavers aged 18 and above were in Staying Put arrangements, of which thirty eight were within Lincolnshire, and of the forty five, six were attending university, twenty four were in full or part-time education, five were in employment, two were on an apprenticeship, and two were on the Care Leavers Apprenticeship Scheme.

Thanks were extended to all foster carers and foster carer champions for their continued positive influence and impact in all areas of fostering practice.

During discussion and consideration of the item, the following points were noted:

- That 89 unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people had come into the service via the national transfer scheme and that most were age disputed or considered to be over the age of 16 years of age;
- The Council's lawful duty to unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people. The Panel was advised that the council would look to use accommodation that was the most suitable, particularly where their age was disputed, because if there was any doubt there would be a number of rigorous checks for them to be able to live in a fostering household. The council therefore had to balance between doing the right thing lawfully and morally for the young person who had arrived in the United Kingdom, but they also had to manage the needs, safeguarding, and the welfare of other Children in Care. The Panel noted that not more than 10 unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people were in foster care currently;
- Some concern was raised about the potential impact the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people could have on the outstanding service. The Panel was advised that anybody who was age disputed was entitled to an age assessment, which was a detailed assessment conducted by two qualified social workers over a period of a couple of days to try and establish age. Then, depending on the age, needs, and background, the young person would be placed accordingly. It was noted that some young people came through the national transfer scheme, whilst others arrived more spontaneously i.e., found in lorries at the side of the roads. In conclusion, it was highlighted the council had a legal responsibility to children and young people and that responsibility would always be administered; and
- Confirmation was given that a Kinship foster carer would go through the same process as a foster carer.

Thanks were extended by the Chairman to the presenters.

RESOLVED

That the Fostering Annual Report 2022-2023 be received and endorsed.

22 CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report from Tracy Johnson, Senior Scrutiny Officer, which invited the Panel to consider its work programme as detailed on pages 169 to 174 of the report pack.

The Senior Scrutiny Officer advised that from earlier discussion, liaison would be undertaken with the Head of Service for Leaving Care, Supported Living and Unaccompanied Children and the Head of Service – Quality and Standards and Principal Social Worker regarding further information being received relating to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to be included in a future performance report/separate report.

It was reported that as the Fostering Quarterly Performance reporting had got slightly out of sync, it was proposed for the November meeting the Panel would receive both Quarters 1 and 2 Fostering Quarterly Performance reports.

RESOLVED

1. That the work programme as presented on pages 169 to 174 be received and approved subject to the inclusion of the suggestion mentioned above.

23 ADOPTION STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2022-2023

RESOLVED

That the Adoption Statement of Purpose 2022-2023 be noted.

24 FOSTERING STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2022-2023

RESOLVED

That the Fostering Statement of Purpose 2022-2023 be noted.

The meeting closed at 12.20 pm