

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

14 MARCH 2024

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR S P ROE (CHAIRMAN)

Lincolnshire County Council: Councillors A G Hagues (Vice-Chairman), Mrs N F Clarke, C Matthews and N Sear

Added Members: Ann Wright (Foster Carer) and Sarah Bancroft (Lincolnshire Community Health Services)

Officers in attendance:-

Tara Jones (Assistant Director - Children's Safeguarding), Andrew Morris (Head of Service - Leaving Care, Semi-Independent Living and Unaccompanied Children), Emily Wilcox (Democratic Services Officer), Tracy Johnson (Senior Scrutiny Officer), Deborah Crawford (Head of Service - Fostering and Adoption), Nicola Wilkinson (NHS Lincolnshire ICB), Sarah Lane (Virtual School Head) and Paul Fisher (Corporate Parenting Manager)

45 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were recorded from Polly Coombes (Foster Carer) and Caroline Sanders (Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust).

46 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were declared.

47 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 18 JANUARY 2024

It was agreed that the following amendments be made to minute 41 on page 5 of the agenda pack:

- Bullet point 2 on page 5 be amended to clarify that there were 101 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Lincolnshire and the maximum Lincolnshire was expected to take was 144.
- That bullet point 3 on page 5 be amended to reflect that when children are placed on remand they automatically become a child in care.

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 January be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the amendments set out above.

48 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN AND CHIEF OFFICERS

With sadness the Chairman announced the passing of Councillor Julie Killey, who had been a member of the Panel since November 2020 and represented the Lincoln Park electoral division and was also the Labour Group representative on the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and Corporate Parenting Panel. On behalf of the Panel, the Chairman extended deepest condolences to her family during this difficult time.

The Panel observed a minute's silence as tribute to Councillor Killey.

The Chairman provided an update on the visiting members to Children's Homes – Councillor Gary Taylor has been appointed the visiting member for Spalding and Councillor Matt Boles had been appointed as the visiting member for Gainsborough. The relevant checks and training were underway.

Tara Jones, Assistant Director – Children's Safeguarding was delighted to report that Riverhead House, the Council's newly built children's home based in Louth, was now fully registered with Ofsted, with the first child placed. Supported accommodation at Denton and Rowston were also now fully registered with Ofsted.

49 LINCOLNSHIRE VIRTUAL SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2022-23

Consideration was given to a report by Sarah Lane, Virtual School Head, which introduced the Lincolnshire Virtual School Annual Report for the Academic Year 2022-23, as set out at Appendix A to the report.

During the discussion on this item, the following points were recorded:

- Young people would always be encouraged to apply to education settings which were geographically the closest, as it was not considered appropriate for young people to be travelling long distances to attend an education setting.
- Officers were not concerned about post 16 attendance data or that Ofsted outcomes had an impact on young people's attendance. Assurance was provided that colleges provided a high level of support for young people despite Ofsted ratings and whilst it was not a statutory requirement, each college had a designated lead to support young people who attended.
- Members welcomed the report and the positive outcomes shown.
- In relation to concerns raised over the increase in Lincolnshire's persistence absence rate from 12.3% to 24.5%, it was acknowledged that this was a complex issue and based on individual circumstance. Many children had found the transition back to education difficult following covid lockdowns.
- Assurance was provided that any young person who was not attending an education setting regularly would be involved in termly targeted support visits and a

multiagency discussion would take place to identify barriers to attending education and address challenges where possible to support attendance. Assurance was provided that attendance was a priority both locally and nationally.

- Members sought assurance that children on a Child in Need or Child Protection Plan would no longer be excluded without representation or appeal by the child's family or social worker. Members were reassured that social workers were being upskilled to ensure they could represent pupils at Governor's Pupil Disciplinary committees which would include providing additional information on individuals that may have contributed to exclusions. Parents were kept fully informed throughout the exclusion process and provided with opportunities to challenge exclusions.
- National data suggested rates of Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) were increasing. However, Officers acknowledged that Lincolnshire had a higher rate of children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP), including children in care. There had been an increase in the complexity of children's needs. There was some misunderstanding that an EHCP was necessary to meet the needs of SEND children. However, Officers were working to emphasise that many children's needs could be met without an EHCP.
- Support from the Virtual School ended once a young person turned 18, unless they requested additional support. The Virtual School was working with the Leaving Care Service to potentially extend involvement to the end of the academic year in which the individual turned 18, which was above statutory duties.
- The post of Team Manager was subject to job evaluation due to the increase in duties and once finalised recruitment would commence.

RESOLVED

That the report be reviewed and the Lincolnshire Virtual School Annual Report for the academic year 2022-23 be endorsed.

50 CHILDREN IN CARE PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 3

Consideration was given to a report by the Assistant Director – Children's Safeguarding, which set out the key performance information for quarter 3 of 2023-24 which was relevant to the work of the Panel, as set out on pages 47 to 70 of the agenda pack.

It was reported that of the 16 measures reported, two did not meet their target and two were ahead of the target. A breakdown was provided at Appendix A to the report.

During the discussion on this item, the following points were recorded:

Percentage of Children in Care with an up to date health check:

- The need to ensure that Children in Care felt supported to have health checks and ensure they felt safe and looked after was emphasised. Officers highlighted the importance of health promotion from early years settings, although acknowledged

that children coming into care later could sometimes be more difficult to support in terms of health needs.

Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training:

1. In relation to the data on page 48 that stated that 28 young people were unable to work due to illness/disability, the Panel requested that in future, distinctions be made between those with illness and disability.
2. Some members expressed disappointment that the target had still not been met and emphasised the importance of ensuring that all care leavers had the chance to undertake education, employment and training, and that the Council enabled them to take that chance.
3. Officers expected that some of the children in care without an up-to-date health check would also not be engaging in education, employment and training as it was acknowledged that many of these individuals had extremely complex needs and mental health needs. Assurance was provided that emotional wellbeing and mental health workers were now established within the leaving care service who would support those children who were not engaging.
4. Children and Young People were supported by foster carers, social workers, the virtual school and health teams, however many individuals entering their teenage years sought to normalise themselves and made a conscious decision not to engage with health assessments and education support as this was not offered to their peers.
5. A briefing session on the topic of education, employment and training for care leavers was proposed for the 5 June 2024 and members would receive an invitation in due course.
6. Members appreciated that some of the complexities and detail could not be included within the report but suggested it would be useful to provide further explanation within the report to allow members to better understand the data.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be reviewed and that satisfaction with the performance measures relevant to Children in care for Quarter 3 of 2023/24 be recorded;
2. That the request for a distinction between those unable to work due to illness or disability in future reports be noted.

51 FOSTERING QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT - QUARTER THREE

Consideration was given to a report by Deborah Crawford, Head of Service – Fostering and Adoption, which provided an overview of the Fostering Service performance for quarter 3 of 2023-24, as detailed on pages 71 to 94 of the agenda pack.

The Head of Service – Fostering and Adoption emphasised the challenges with recruiting Foster Carers and expressed gratitude to all Lincolnshire’s Foster Carers for their outstanding commitment and level of work.

Ann Wright, Foster Carer Representative appreciated the recognition and high level of support offered to Lincolnshire's Foster Carers.

During the discussion on this item, the following points were recorded:

- The Committee echoed the comments made and thanked both the Fostering Team for their passion, commitment and quality of service and Foster Carers for their hard work and ongoing support.
- It was suggested that more data including key figures be provided in future reports to allow further analysis of Lincolnshire's position, which was supported by Officers.
- The Panel was reassured that Lincolnshire was one of the strongest performing authorities in terms of recruitment and retention of Foster Carers and percentage of Children in Care placed within a family setting.
- Members welcomed the introduction of the Government's Kinship Strategy and the additional flexibility this would bring. It was clarified that the Kinship Strategy was launched in December and it was still unclear which eight local authorities would be selected to take part in the project. Officers felt that the strategy would create a level playing field and fairness across the country to enable families, friends and connected persons to step forward and care for looked after children. Assurance was provided that in Lincolnshire, kinship carers were treated in the same way as foster carers.
- The Panel was advised that the Fosterlink Service had been launched by the Government. Children's Services would be receiving a visit next week from the Department for Education to carry out a health check of where Lincolnshire was in regard to fostering. It was requested that the report setting out the outcomes from the visit be shared with the Panel.
- Officers emphasised that apart from certain children who had an assessed need to be placed in a residential setting, they would always look to place children within a family setting and would always explore foster placements and placements with family members or extended family members as a priority. Although Lincolnshire may look for opportunities for capital funding to build further children's homes in the future, the priority to place children in a family setting was reiterated.
- The Chairman commended the newly built Riverhead children's home in Louth and the positive benefit it offered to Lincolnshire.
- The Panel recognised the ongoing challenges with the efforts made to advertising the role of foster carers.

RESOLVED

1. That the progress made within the Fostering Service had been reviewed.
2. That the report be accepted as an accurate overview of the Fostering Service.
3. That the findings of the Fosterlink Service visit be shared with the Panel.

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52 CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report by Tracy Johnson, Senior Scrutiny Officer, which invited the Panel to review its work programme, as set out on pages 85-88 of the agenda pack.

One amendment to the work programme was reported which was the addition of a report on proposed constitutional changes to the terms of reference of the Corporate Parenting Panel, which would be brought for consideration by the Panel at its meeting on 9 May 2024. The proposals would then be ratified by Full Council on 17 May 2024.

The Chairman reminded members about the Education, Employment and Training workshop which would take place on 5 June 2024 on Microsoft Teams. An appointment would be sent to members of the Panel in due course.

RESOLVED

That the work programme be approved.

The meeting closed at 11.55 am