

**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL
15 DECEMBER 2016**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR D BRAILSFORD (CHAIRMAN)

Lincolnshire County Council: Councillors J D Hough (Vice-Chairman), R A H McAuley and Mrs N J Smith

Added Members: Jean Burbidge (Lincolnshire Community Health Services), Polly Coombes (Foster Carer) and Ann Wright (Foster Carer)

No Councillors attended the meeting as observers

Officers in attendance:-

Michelle Andrews (Head of Birth to Five Service), Kieran Barnes (Head of Virtual School, Looked After Children), Andrea Brown (Democratic Services Officer), John Harris (Service Manager Regulated North and Fostering), John Herbert (Youth Development Hub Manager), Tracy Johnson (Senior Scrutiny Officer), Tara Jones (Service Manager Regulated South and Adoption), Kerry Mitchell (Assistant Director - Barnardo's), Yvonne Shearwood (Quality and Assurance Manager) and Janice Spencer (Assistant Director Safeguarding)

28 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Wootten, P J O'Connor and A G Hagues.

There were no replacement members in attendance.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Mrs N J Smith following her appointment to the Panel in place of Councillor R J Hunter-Clarke.

29 DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were no declarations of Members' interests at this point in the meeting.

30 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 SEPTEMBER 2016

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2016 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

31 VISITING MEMBERS QUARTERLY REPORT

Consideration was given to a report in relation to the Visiting Members' Log of quarterly visits to Children's Homes.

The Panel was advised that the concerns raised regarding the property issues at Haven Cottage were being addressed. Work was to commence in the third week of January to the corridors which would mean that the home would be closed between two and three weeks to minimise any disruption. It was anticipated that short breaks would be offered to families during this time.

Members of the Panel were invited to ask questions on the content of the report, during which the following point was noted:-

- A number of emergency admissions at Albion Street had contributed to increased issues including outstanding oversight and monitoring protocols not being completed. The rating of the home immediately dropped from 'outstanding' to 'requires improvement' and a lot of work had been subsequently taken to raise staff morale, to promote the purpose of the home to both staff and young people, all of whom were now settled and regularly attending school, and to reinstate the equilibrium and 'outstanding' rating.

RESOLVED

That the Visiting Members log of quarterly visits be noted.

32 PERFORMANCE - QUARTER 2

The Corporate Parenting Panel received the performance report for key performance indicators (KPIs) relevant to the work of the Panel. It was reported that there were four KPIs which were underreporting although the Panel was advised that targets remained aspirational and set at a very high level.

The following was noted in relation to some of the indicators:-

Stability of placements of looked after children: length of placement:

- There has been a steady improvement in the performance in this area. A focus group with foster carers had been held and it was hoped that this indicator would provide a better understanding of the support required by foster carers to sustain permanent places.

Participation of LAC in reviews:

- This indicator had not been met due to three reviews which had not been attended by LAC;
- It was confirmed that these were unaccompanied asylum seeking children who had absconded from placement at the time of the review;
- The Panel was advised that in these circumstances, the police were informed in addition to the Border Agency and Home Office. A risk assessment was

also undertaken to enable a decision to be taken in terms of risk for those children;

- It had been recently reported by a Foster Carer that they believed the child in their care was older than first thought as he was in possession of a passport and funds. The Panel was advised that there was difficulty in ascertaining the age of some asylum seekers and this did provide additional complications.

Percentage of Looked After Children with an up to date routine immunisations:

- The target for this indicator had not been met and the Panel was advised that teenagers were able to opt out of immunisation. Nurses were, however, good at encouraging them to have these but it was thought the indicator had not been met due to a small number of young people who refuse;
- It was confirmed that 100% of under 5s were up to date with immunisations. The Panel asked if a breakdown for over 11s and under 11s could be provided in the next report.

Care Leavers in Suitable Accommodation:

- The Panel was pleased to note that the target for this indicator had been exceeded. Negotiations with landlords had been a success with a small number now renting properties to care leavers. This work continued.

RESOLVED

That the performance information presented be noted.

At 10.23am, Councillor J D Hough, Vice-Chairman, joined the meeting.

33 REGULATION 44 REPORTS - 6 MONTHLY SUMMARY OF INDEPENDENT VISITING SERVICE

The Corporate Parenting Panel received the half yearly report for the Independent Visiting Service from April 2016 to September 2016 where it was reported that all homes within the Local Authority, including the secure unit, had been rated as 'good' or 'outstanding'.

It was explained to the Panel that the model included within the Regulation 44 report had been adopted and rolled out in all homes. Page 34 of the agenda pack referred to recruitment campaigns and the Panel was advised that the marketing of these campaign drives was not independent but an internal recruitment team who had undertaken this specific piece of work.

During discussion of this item, the following points were noted:-

- The Panel was pleased to note that Ildiko Kiss (Regulation 43 Officer) appeared to be welcomed in the role, albeit a critical role, but generally was felt to be supporting homes now which resulted in better communication;
- Following the incident at the secure unit, it had been reported by the Youth Justice Board that the staff could not have done any more to manage or

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prevent that loss of control. The Panel was advised that the staff went through an horrific ordeal during the incident and were now being fully supported;

- The report indicated that Strut House had not yet been inspected, however the Panel was advised that the inspection had been carried out on 15 November 2016 and that the report found the home to be 'outstanding';
- Recruitment of staff remained an issue, particularly in certain areas including the Beacon in Grantham. Recruitment advertising was being widened to neighbouring authorities in an attempt to attract more applicants;
- Older staff occasionally found it difficult to continue with certain functions of the role, i.e. restraint. Work was ongoing to provide those staff with ability to move in to other roles, for example early health teams, to provide initial support to families;
- The application form had also been amended as it had been found that the original system of applying for these roles had been a key deterrent for applicants;
- The review of applicants also suggested that the right people were not being attracted and it was thought that this may be due to the grade offered;
- The Panel was assured that all homes were now fully established but some vacancies had arisen in frontline positions due to substantive postholders taking maternity leave, for example. The report referred to recruitment issues prior to September 2016 which had now been addressed.

RESOLVED

That the content of the Regulation 44 Reports – 6 monthly summary of Independent Visiting Service be noted.

34 INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE SIX MONTHLY UPDATE

The Corporate Parenting Panel received the Six Monthly Update of the Independent Reviewing Service from April 2016 to September 2016 which provided an overview of looked after children from the perspective of the Independent Reviewing Service.

The Panel was reminded that every child looked after by Lincolnshire County Council was required to have a Care Plan detailing the long term plan for the child's upbringing. There was also a requirement to have an Independent Reviewing Officer appointed to them under Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. The Independent Reviewing Officers handbook specified that continuity should be provided and that they should strive to establish a consistent relationship with the child.

The last six months had brought a number of challenges which included an increase in the number of children who were looked after in addition to staffing shortages. However, all of these challenges had been responded to positively by the teams involved, with the children remaining the focus of the service. It was recognised that more work needed to be done to ensure the number of children attending reviews was increased and that the relationships with young people and their expectations from these meetings be identified and acknowledged.

During discussion, the following points were noted:-

- Children were now included when setting up the review meetings to give them a greater sense of ownership which had resulted in increased engagement;
- It was agreed that some young people were not confident in settings where a number of people were in attendance, especially if they felt they were being talked about. Part of the challenge was to include young people in the discussions and understand their views;
- "Keep in touch" meetings with young people were implemented to give the opportunity for issues to be raised in a much more relaxed way. More active and two-way communications were being implemented as a matter of course rather than as a set process to follow. These issues had also been discussed at the Big Conversation;
- It was difficult to be specific about the reasons for the low figures for the number of pathway plans and medical assessments however young people had the right to decline a health assessment and there was perhaps a need to explore how better levels of engagement could be reached. In terms of pathway plans this had been identified as an area of difficulty and there had been considerable work undertaken in order to revise the format of the plans and make these more child friendly. It was noted that there had been recent improvements in the plans for both of these areas. It was also noted that there was sometimes a delay in confirming medical appointments, however the IROs would, in future, make use of the current medical assessment as long as it was clear that there were plans for the next six monthly assessment to take place;
- A suggestion was made that all health assessments should be on file to be checked against even if the most recent had not yet been completed. This was agreed;
- Foster Carers were concerned that they did not fully understand the Signs of Safety following implementation and were finding it difficult to review areas as they were unsure what the benchmark was. It was agreed that an explanation of the benchmarks would be issued to Foster Carers but that the method for doing so was to be agreed.

RESOLVED

That the content of the Six Monthly Update of the Independent Reviewing Service be noted.

35 V4C THE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN COUNCIL QUARTERLY MINUTES AND ANNUAL REPORT

The Corporate Parenting Panel received the V4C Annual Report which provided detail of the new model of V4C where new quadrant meetings would commence in January 2017.

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The FAB! Awards were particularly mentioned due to the potential relocation of the venue from the Lincolnshire Showground to the City of Lincoln Academy. The event was also moving to July 2017 to enable more outdoor activities.

During discussion, the following points were noted:-

- The feedback received from Looked After Children noted within Appendix C to the report was gained from the opportunity the children were given to provide that feedback. Concern was noted that some children may not have the confidence to feedback to their social worker, and it was explained that there were a number of channels available to young people, including the Independent Reviewing Officers and Advocacy Service;
- Feedback was also gained from the Tell Us Survey which was reviewed by the Children's Services Manager (Regulated – South and Adoption) who would identify any issues raised with the relevant Social Worker and Manager;
- It was reported that the most common complaint received from children was the time taken for the Social Worker to respond to them;
- There was a concern that there was some misinterpretation of the regulations in relation to families of foster carers requiring DBS checks before they were able to stay with family. Officers agreed to look at this further to understand where the confusion lay;
- The new model would have each quadrant holding a minimum of seven meetings in addition to three Big Conversation meetings to which Councillors would be invited. The V4C Executive would continue to meet three times per year and would include some of the members from the Quadrant groups;
- Members of the V4C Executive who were over 16 would not be excluded and would be used to guide younger members and become mentors for these groups. The Panel suggested that the Looked After Children age bracket be amended from 8-16 to 8-18.

RESOLVED

That the content of the V4C Looked After Children Council Quarterly Minutes and Annual report be noted.

36 ANNUAL REPORT AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE ON PRIVATE FOSTERING 2015/16

The Corporate Parenting Panel received a report which provided information on the performance and developments within Private Fostering. It was noted that approval was required for the Private Fostering Annual Report 2015/16 and the Statement of Purpose 2016/17 from the Executive Councillor responsible for Children's Services.

Members were invited to ask questions, during which the following points were noted:-

- The report referred to the provision of advice to Private Foster Carers in relation to education for children. It was explained that this would be offered on an individual basis as this was not in the domain of the school as the children were not Looked After Children. They did, however, have Social

Workers from the Looked After Children's team so would receive this support but in a different way;

- It was acknowledged that a balance was needed in relation to private arrangements and the potential interference of the state as there was no framework in place for those children in the 'grey' areas which made them difficult to track and manage;
- The Panel was assured that, in order to manage that type of situation, the Social Worker would proactively raise any concerns with parents following which there would be the ability to issue a prohibition notice to enforce authority fostering, should that be required.

RESOLVED

That the Corporate Parenting Panel recommends the approval of the Private Fostering Annual Report 2015/16 and the Statement of Purpose 2016/17.

37 THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL FOR LINCOLNSHIRE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN ANNUAL REPORT

The Corporate Parenting Panel received the Annual Report of the Virtual School for Lincolnshire Looked After Children November 2015-October 2016.

It was reported that there had been an increase in Looked After Children to 520 which had resulted in an increase in staff. The Panel was advised that interviews had been held in November and a full complement of staff put in place as a result.

A bid to the Education Business Partnership (EBP) to engage in a business mentoring process for children between eight and 19 years old had been successful and would commence in January 2017. There would be 50 children included within the first year with a view to increasing that figure to over 100 hundred. The Panel would receive an evaluation report in 2017.

Members were invited to ask questions, during which the following points were noted:-

- The Vice-Chairman reported that he had attended PALAC, Promoting Achievement of Looked After Children, with the Chairman which had highlighted the difficulties found by some teachers to successfully use ePEPS and also the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The Panel was assured that these cases were isolated and when looked at further were generally as a result of a transition period from an experienced member of staff to a new employee;
- The Vice-Chairman had attended a conference in London on 1st December 2016 where the role of corporate parenting was discussed. It was reported that Scotland had changed the role of the corporate parent where all partners had responsibility for corporate parenting and this had shown evidence of some success. The Panel requested further information on this particular model as it was suggested that this may be beneficial to Lincolnshire;

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- The Vice-Chairman visited the Young People's Learning Provision (YPLP) and had been impressed with the work undertaken.

RESOLVED

That the content of the Virtual School for Lincolnshire Looked After Children Annual Report be noted.

38 CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17

Consideration was given to the Work Programme and the Panel was reminded that the next meeting would take place on 16 March 2017.

It was requested, and agreed, that the item entitled Corporate Parenting Strategy Review be deferred from the next meeting to the June meeting.

RESOLVED

That the Work Programme as presented, with the amendment noted above, be agreed.

The meeting closed at 12.02 pm