



CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL 19 SEPTEMBER 2019

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR D BRAILSFORD (CHAIRMAN)

Lincolnshire County Council: Councillors S R Parkin, Clio Perraton-Williams (Vice-Chairman) and M A Whittington.

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

Officers in attendance:-

Kieran Barnes (Virtual School Head Teacher), Nicola Brangam (Children's Services Agency Advisor, Fostering and Adoption), Nicola Corby (Acting Principal Lawyer), Deborah Crawford (Team Manager - Fostering South), Andrew Morris (Corporate Parenting Manager), Krysta Parsons (Caring to Learn Project Manager), Yvonne Shearwood (Children's Service Manager - Regulated (South and Adoption)), Janice Spencer OBE (Interim Director of Children's Services), Daniel Steel (Scrutiny Officer) and Rachel Wilson (Democratic Services Officer).

15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A G Hagues and R H Trollope-Bellew.

An apology for absence was also received from Polly Coombes (Foster Carer) and Amy Lavery.

16 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTEREST

Councillor M A Whittington wished it to be noted that he had an adopted son who was in receipt of services from Barnardos.

17 MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL MEETING HELD ON 25 JULY 2019

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Panel meeting held on 25 July 2019 be agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

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AND LEAD OFFICER**

The Interim Director of Children's Services reported that the results of the Ofsted Inspection held in May 2019 for Children's Social Care Service had been published and that the service was awarded a rating of 'outstanding' for all areas. It was noted that Lincolnshire was one of only eight authorities in the country that had received this rating.

**19 LEGAL SERVICES LINCOLNSHIRE END OF YEAR REPORT APRIL 2018
TO MARCH 2019**

Consideration was given to a report from Nicola Corby, Acting Principal Lawyer, which provided the Corporate Parenting Panel with the end of year report (April 2018 to March 2019) for Legal Services Lincolnshire.

The Committee was advised of the two types of proceedings in which Children's Services were involved, these were Public Law Proceedings and Private Law Proceedings. Pages 13 and 14 provided the Panel with an explanation of the two types of proceedings. Page 15 of the report provided the Panel with details of the number of care proceedings issued between April 2018 and March 2019. Page 17 of the report provided an analysis of outcomes for children who had been the subject of care proceedings. The analysis highlighted that there had been a reduction in the number of Care and Placement Orders as well as Supervision Orders. It was highlighted that for 2017/18 132 applications had been issued in respect of 135 children and in 2018/19 156 applications had been issued in respect of 184 children. It was highlighted further that for the 184 children there had been 156 applications for Care Orders and 28 applications for Supervision Orders. A pie chart on page 20 of the report provided the Panel with pictorial evidence of the number of Orders granted in 2018/19.

The Committee was advised that Special Guardianship Orders had been introduced by the Adoption and Children Act 2002; and that they were initially intended as a permanent legal action for older children, who had a pre-existing relationship with a relative/long term foster carer/family friend. Pages 26 and 27 of the report provided the Panel with details relating to the number of Special Guardianship Orders granted in 2018/19; as well as comparative information to 2017/18; and an analysis of ages. It was reported that half the children subject to proceedings concluded 2018/19, were of an age where a plan of adoption could be progressed 0 to 5. It was highlighted that the average timescale for proceeding in 2018/19 was 36.5 weeks, in contrast to 34 weeks in 2017/18. Details relating to timescale for 2018/19 were shown on pages 29 and 30 of the report.

The Panel was advised that the shortest case had been five weeks and the longest case had been 87 weeks. Details of each of the aforementioned cases were shown on pages 30 to 34 of the report.

In conclusion, the Panel noted that in 2018/19 the number of cases concluded had remained static compared to the number of cases concluded in 2017/18 as only a decrease of 1% had occurred.

During discussion, the Panel raised the following points:-

- In terms of pre-proceedings, it was queried whether the proposed changes would increase the workload of the children's services department. The Panel was advised that this would increase the workload initially, however, if the assessments were robust enough, this may avoid long court proceedings. It was highlighted to members that if this process could be got right, it would be a positive thing as children would not have to go through court proceedings. If the changes were to come into force, in Lincolnshire there would only need to be a few changes to how things were done, rather than a wholesale change of processes.
- It was highlighted that page 20 of the agenda pack referred to support services being provided by the local authority for up to three years when a Special Guardianship Order was granted, and it was queried what happened if the child reached the age of 18 before the 3 years. It was reported that SGO support would lapse at 18, but the young person would become eligible for leaving care support.
- It was queried whether there were any differences in the breakdown of placements for SGO's when compared to other placements and if there was anything the authority could do to prevent the breakdown. The Board was advised that significant work was being undertaken on the disruption policy. However, it was noted that disruption for an SGO would be after the order had been granted. Work was ongoing on a support package for carers, to ensure they knew they were able to come for a review at any time.
- As part of the kinship agenda, officers looked robustly at how to make SGO's work. It was important that people knew they were able to come back to the authority for support, and the plans needed to be as robust as possible.
- SGO support groups were starting to be developed, which were similar to those for foster carers.
- It was noted that kinship assessments were incredibly robust, and went through a Panel process. By the time it got to court, officers could say with confidence that the relative was able to meet the needs of the child.
- It was queried whether there was any mechanism where the authority reached out to people. It was noted that this was the case for those carers that received a financial payment as their finances were assessed annually.
- It was commented that SGO's were really positive, as it was important to keep vulnerable children within their own families. The same checks were applied to SGO's as fosterers. It would be ensured that there were not any generational issues which could impact on the child.
- It was queried whether step family members would be considered, and the Board was advised that social workers would look at families to establish who would be the most appropriate person to care for that child within Lincolnshire.
- It was noted that in terms of support for SGO's, it was work in progress, and the Adoption Team was looking into providing support and ensuring that what

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was provided for adoptive families was also provided for SGO's. The timescale for completing this work was the end of 2019. However, it was noted that this was a big piece of work and was looking at a number of issues, including the financing of placements, and practical and emotional support that was offered to families and children.

- It was noted that Looked After Children, once they left care were entitled to £2300 pupil premium, for schools to provide appropriate support. It was commented that it was understood that under the new Ofsted framework, this was not something that would be examined in the future. It was queried whether something would be put in place to ensure that schools were accountable for how they used that money. It was noted that Ofsted would still be looking at performance of children with protected characteristics and it was expected that inspectors would be interested in the number of Looked After Children and how they were progressing.

RESOLVED

That the Legal Services Lincolnshire End of Year Report be noted.

20 CARING2LEARN - YEAR 2 UPDATE

The Panel gave consideration to a report from Krysta Parsons, Project Manager, which provided an update on the implementation and impact of the Caring2Learn project.

In guiding the Panel through the report, reference was made to the background behind the project. It was highlighted that Caring2Learn was a multi-agency approach which was focussed on improving a wide range of educational outcomes for looked after children and young people from Early Years to post 16. It was noted that Caring2Learn was supporting schools to be able to nurture and promote wellbeing and attachment and ensuring Looked After Children achieved better than expected progress whilst in care, as well as enhancing training for and raising the profile of the role of the Designated Teacher. It was noted further that the project was developing foster carers resilience, knowledge and skills to promote learning in the home and help children develop a desire for learning.

The Panel was advised that Caring2Learn was funded by the Department for Education as part of the Partners in Practice programme until the end of March 2020; it was noted that funding for an extension of the project had been agreed until April 2021.

Details of the three main areas of work of the Caring 2Learn project were shown on pages 38 to 40 of the report presented.

The following Appendices accompanied the report:-

- Appendix A – A copy of the Caring2Learn training events from September 2019 to March 2020;
- Appendix B – A copy of the Caring2Learn, Caring School Toolkit;

- Appendix C – A copy of the Caring2Learn, Learning Homes Workbook; and
- Appendix D – A copy of the Caring2Learn Cased Studies and Impact Evaluations.

The Panel was advised that positive comments from the 'Outstanding' OFSTED inspection carried out in April 2019 had been received, and a summary of these comments were shown on pages 40 and 41 of the report.

In conclusion, the Panel was advised that evidence over the last eighteen months had shown that the Caring2Learn project had the impact on and had the potential to positively affect the work of a wide range of teams. It was highlighted that it was therefore essential that the project continued to be a comprehensive multi-disciplined approach as it integrates into everyday business.

It was reported that there had been considerable interest in the project from the Department for Education, other local Authorities, schools and organisations. It was noted that from September 2019, a trial implementation of Caring2Learn was commencing with North Lincolnshire Children's Services. It was noted further that the small trial would explore the viability of the commercial and income generating possibilities of Caring2Learn which could support the continuation of the approach within Lincolnshire for the benefit of children and young people.

It was highlighted that during the last academic year an action research project was run in conjunction with the UCL Institute of Education as part of the Promoting Achievement of Looked After Children Programme which focused on the implementation of a 10 week literacy intervention with 10 KS2 pupils in 5 schools. The intervention was based on joint working between educational psychologists, foster carers, teachers and teaching assistants and included activities based in the individual needs and personal interests of the child. There were two sessions a week at school and two sessions a week at home. The children were reassessed after 5 months, with very positive results. On average the children had made a two year improvement in their reading age. The carers had been fully involved with the school.

The Board was provided with the opportunity to ask questions to the officers present in relation to the information contained within the report and some of the points raised during discussion included the following:

- From a foster carer perspective, it was highlighted that one of the issues experienced when going through the process to become a foster carer, was the need to have 1 year of evidence, and new fosterers did not always have all the experience necessary and there would be a need to generate situations to obtain the evidence. This could be very challenging and it would be interesting to see how this process had evolved.
- In terms of the tool kit, there were concerns that it may be a bit onerous for foster carers to complete. It was queried whether there was any feedback from schools about what the process had been like for them. The Panel was informed that feedback had been positive and schools were willing to go through this process. Schools were offered 2.5 days per year per school for

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the Project Manager to work with them on their improvement plans. So far, there were 150 schools involved and over 100 foster carers. Feedback on the training had been really positive.

- It was commented that this was dealing with outcomes that were hard to quantify. The need to measure exam results was recognised, but it was important to not lose track of an increase in a child's confidence. If they developed an interest in something, other aspects of learning would follow.
- It was commented that it was good progress that 150 schools had signed up, and it was confirmed that this was about 50% of schools in the county. Officers had written to 125 head teachers who had Looked After Children on roll, to advise of the support which was available.
- It was queried whether once a school had achieved accreditation if it could be removed if standards were not maintained. Members were advised that there was no precedent for this at the moment, but there was the ability to hold the schools to account. However, it was likely that once that status had been achieved they would want to hold onto it and progress further.
- Of the 100 schools that had accessed the toolkit, it was confirmed that 37 had achieved the Caring Schools accreditation and two had reapplied to have their standard reassessed at a higher level. Therefore, the remaining 61 were currently working towards their accreditation.
- It was commented that it was very important to promote wellbeing. The Panel was advised that this was a key message, as there was a need to get to the child right place emotionally so they wanted to learn. It was also important for aspirations to not be too low. Expectations, historically, had generally been too low for looked after children. There was a need to let them reach their potential and have their own aspirations of what they wanted to achieve. It was highlighted that the key was to give the child the confidence that they could reach their aspirations.
- It was noted that one of the comments from Ofsted was praising the tenacity of the team.

RESOLVED

That the Caring2Learn project update be noted.

21 ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Consideration was given to a report from Yvonne Shearwood, Children's Services Manager – Regulated (South and Adoption), which provided the Panel with an overview of the adoption service.

The Panel noted that under the requirements of the National Standards, members, in their role as Corporate Parents should be informed on a regular basis about the activity of the Adoption Service. Detailed at Appendix A to the report was a copy of the Annual Adoption Report 2019/2019; and at Appendix B was a copy of the Adoption Statement of Purpose for the Panel to consider.

It was highlighted that the challenges for 2018/19 had been to adjust services in line with the significant service development from the previous year; whilst maintaining high levels of performance against government targets. It was highlighted further that performance in 2019/19 against the key threshold measures in the adoption scorecard had improved both for the single year and for the three year rolling average. The Panel was advised that the number of adoptions completed was back to the average, but the timescales had improved. It was noted that the number of children waiting at year-end had decreased due to the team being proactive in family finding.

The Panel noted that in October 2015, the service had achieved a judgement of 'Outstanding', which was a strong endorsement of the professionalism and expertise within the team and the confidence shown to the service by senior managers and the council as a whole. The Panel noted further that in March 2017, it was announced that Lincolnshire was to be a 'Partner in Practice.'

It was highlighted that going forward the Service would be looking to positively respond to the challenges presented, whilst maintaining its strong focus on delivering excellent outcomes for the children of Lincolnshire who have a plan for adoption.

During discussion, the Panel made reference to the following points:-

- Work was taking place with Leicestershire, Leicester City and Rutland putting together a business case on how the requirements of the government could be delivered for a new regional adoption agency for the East Midlands. Lincolnshire had been rated as an outstanding adoption agency for the last 10 years, and there would be a need for careful management to ensure the authority could support the other authorities whilst not negatively affecting its own service.
- The YOS model was being looked at, as it was noted that this was a well established model. A lot of work had been carried out so far and assessment processes had been aligned, as well as work on family funding and family medical officers. Operationally, the region was in a very good place.
- It was commented that there could be significant variation in terms of attendance by adopters at support groups. When families were in crisis they may be more likely to feel that it would be of benefit to attend the groups. Officers were looking at ways to make it more meaningful for these families. Officers were not concerned about the lack of engagement.
- It was commented that this was a good report, and it was pleasing to see that numbers of adoption orders had increased. The majority was still for the 0 – 5 age range.
- In terms of adoption, as part of the proceedings it was considered in the application to court what would be in the best interest of the child if they were not able to go back to their parents or other family members. There were a number of factors to consider, and one of those was age, another was any trauma the child had experienced. In older children the trauma was often manifested in such a way that meant carers were not able to take them on.
- Reference was made to a cap on applications to the Adoption Support Fund, and it was queried what this money was for. The Panel was advised that this

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funding was to support placements, and a cap had been introduced as there was a limited budget, and there was a need to ensure that sufficient support could be offered for all families that requested it. If there were extenuating circumstances it could be possible to increase the amount available.

- It was noted that the £4.5m of start-up funding that was promised by the government did not seem like a lot of money for the whole country. Officers advised that they would ensure that any funding that was received would be spent wisely.
- Members commented that they were pleased to variety of social activities being arranged. It was noted that the aim was to encourage children to experiment and go beyond their comfort zones.

RESOLVED

1. That the Adoption Service Annual Report and Statement of Purpose be noted.
2. That the Adoption Service Annual Report and Statement of Purpose be approved.

22 FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Consideration was given to a report which informed the Corporate Parenting Panel of the work of the Fostering Service for the year 2018/2019 in accordance with the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services 2011 and Fostering National Minimum Standards. The report provided a written summary of the Service, including relevant performance data, achievements and areas for development.

It was reported that Standard 25 of the National Minimum Standards required that the Fostering Service was effectively monitored, including the provision of quarterly written reports and annual service report. The report identified the successes of the Fostering Service and outlined the challenges it was facing.

The Panel was advised that it had been an interesting year in fostering, and a significant amount of work had taken place in preparation for the Ofsted inspection. There were currently 614 Looked After Children, which was a slight reduction on previous years. It was reported that part of the success was due to the number of children who were matched and placed in permanent placements, as well as the ability to place large sibling groups.

There was a need for caution as nationally and regionally it was very difficult to recruit foster carers, so it was important that the authority did not become complacent. There were 28 approvals for foster carers the previous year. However, there were a number who had recently decided to cease fostering. But, officers were reassured when looking at the reasons for leaving, that they were not going to a more competitive agency.

Members of the Panel were provided with the opportunity to ask questions to the officers present in relation to the information contained within the report and some of the points raised during discussion included the following:

- It was noted that Ofsted had given an excellent report of the fostering services at Lincolnshire County Council, but it was queried what the services were like from the perspective of a foster carer. It was commented, by a foster carer, that from her personal experience she had been very well supported and was aware of Caring2Learn (although she was not involved). The experience of supervising social workers had always been positive. She had met a lot of potential foster carers, and fostering was a huge task, as there were so many skills and requirements needed. The support groups and focus groups were invaluable. There was a need to build up a support network of wider foster carers. Whilst her experience had been good, she knew there were other foster carers who had found it more difficult.
- It was accepted that there would always be 'bumps' in the road for foster carers, but recruitment and retention were a concern. It was noted that recruitment was a national issue, and authorities were 9000 households short across the country. It was a serious challenge. Over the last couple of years, Lincolnshire had lost people with a significant amount of experience, however this had often been due to tragic life events or they had been foster carers for many years. Officers were reassured from the exit interviews that those that chose to leave were not doing so due to a lack of support from LCC. It was also noted that the average age of a foster carer was high, and the challenge was to encourage more younger people to become foster carers.
- It was queried whether it was possible to put inserts into County News advertising for foster carers. The Panel was advised that the recruitment strategy was wide reaching and varied, and included targeting the big employers, magazines, it did not rely on social media. There were also face to face recruitment events.
- It was noted that the previous Friday, there had been a session for dual hatted councillors on 'Corporate Parenting across the Districts', and it was reported that 28 councillors had attended, which was a very good turnout.
- There was still work to do with big employers, although some would allow time off if a foster child was ill, as they would for an employee's own child. It was noted that this was something which would be discussed with the district councils.
- The performance measures for placement stability were explained to the Panel, in relation to what was measured as a 'move' which included a child going from home to foster placement, or from a foster placement back home. It was not necessarily a move between foster placements. The Panel was advised that placement stability in Lincolnshire was good, and it was the way that the calculation was done which was mis-leading.
- It was queried whether the Panel could have a presentation on understanding placement stability and the relationship between movements and breakdowns.
- Every child that was placed with a family became a Looked After Child.
- It was noted that there were 641 Looked After Children, and was queried what happened to those children who were not in foster care, or under a Special

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Guardianship Order. Members were advised that some were in children's homes, some would be in a placement with their parent(s) but would remain as LAC before going back to the courts to discharge the order. Some would also be unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

- It was queried whether the only contingency the authority had if there were not enough fosterers was to go to private fosterers. The Panel was advised that the starting point when placing a child was always the family, relatives or connected persons. However, sometimes the size of the sibling group or the trauma experienced by the child made it difficult to place some children. All of the community and family that was appropriate for the child would be considered.
- It was confirmed that there were only 22 children who were in external provision. Eight of those were unaccompanied asylum seeking children. It was highlighted that Lincolnshire children should stay in Lincolnshire where possible.
- It was noted that there were other options available for 16 – 18 year olds, such as supported accommodation.

RESOLVED

1. That the Fostering Annual Report and Statement of Purpose be received.
2. That the Fostering Annual Report and Statement of Purpose for 2018/19 be recommended for approval.

23 PRIVATE FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19

Consideration was given to a report which informed the Corporate Parenting Panel of the state of Private Fostering in accordance with the requirements of the Children Act 1989, the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulation 2005 and the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005, to provide key service performance over the past 12 months.

The Panel was guided through the report and it was noted that there had been a slight reduction in numbers from 32 down to 26 children. There were only 11 private fostering arrangements in place. The LSCB had been very proactive, and it would remain a standing item on the sub-group's agenda.

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions to the officers present in relation to the information contained within the report and some of the points raised during discussion included the following:

- In terms of language schools, was queried whether the children that came to study from other countries were privately fostered, and what happened if those homes were not suitable. The Panel was advised that there were sanctions within the law. An assessment would be carried out and if it was not satisfactory, officers would work with the foster parents to make it satisfactory. The ultimate sanction was a prohibition order.

- There were a number of reasons a child would go into private fostering, such as to manage the breakdown of relationship with parents or parental illness.
- It was noted that there were two children in the 0 – 5 age group in private fostering, and the authority had been keen to understand the reasons for this, which were found to be legitimate. There was a very clear proves to ensure that the placement remained stable.
- Members were advised that there was no average length of stay as each individual case was so different, and the numbers of children involved were very small, therefore any average figures would be distorted. What was important was that the authority knew where the children were.
- It was queried at what point were the authority informed that children were in private foster arrangements, and the Panel was advised that it was usually other professionals that would notify the local authority and make the referral.
- People who were caring for children were subject to an assessment by the fostering service.

RESOLVED

That the Corporate Parenting Panel endorses the current approach to Private Fostering.

24 QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Consideration was given to a report which provided key performance information for quarter 1 2019/20 that was relevant to the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel. It was reported that overall, performance for quarter 1 was positive, with only two areas where the target was not being achieved.

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions to the officers present in relation to the information contained within the report and some of the points raised during discussion included the following:

- Percentage of Looked After Children in the same placement for at least two years – it was commented that as the target had not been achieved (performance was 68.9%), it looked like the authority had failed. It was acknowledged that aspirational targets had been set, but there was a need to determine whether the data could be extrapolated.
- One member commented that they were not wholly concerned about the not achieved targets, as the outcomes were more important. Those children that there were concerns about, officers knew who they were and were working to resolve the issues.

RESOLVED

That the performance information presented be noted.

25 CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME

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The Panel gave consideration to a report from Daniel Steel, Scrutiny Officer, which enabled the Panel to consider and comment on the content of its work programme for the coming year to ensure that scrutiny activity was focussed where it could be of greatest benefit.

The Work Programme for the Corporate Parenting Panel for the period from 19 September 2019 to 23 July 2020 was detailed on pages 296 to 298 for the Panel to consider.

It was reported that the V4C report would now be considered at the meeting on 14 November 2019, and it was also hoped to be able to report some positive news at that meeting regarding V4C.

The Chairman thanked the Members of the Panel and officers for their attendance at the meeting.

RESOLVED

That the work programme as set out in the report be approved.

The meeting closed at 12.41 p.m.