

**REPORT FOR THE
INDEPENDENT VISITING SERVICE**

April 2019- 31 March 2020

Dawn Oldroyd and Eska Verleg

Regulation 44 Visitors

Basis of report

This report is being prepared in order to provide the Corporate Parenting Panel with an update of the work of the Independent Visitor.

Introduction

Part six, regulation 43 of the Children's Home Regulation 2015 makes provision for the appointment of an Independent Visitor. There remains an expectation that the appointment of an Independent Visitor will continue to be the responsibility of the Local Authority, with clear guidance being offered as to the criteria which must be met in terms of ensuring the visitor's independence is clearly demonstrable. The visits continue to be required to be made on a monthly basis.

Within the regulations it is expected the Independent Visitor will report on the quality standards in specified areas. These can be summarised as follows:-

- (a) the quality and purpose of care standard (see regulation 6);
- (b) the children's views, wishes and feelings standard (see regulation 7);
- (c) the education standard (see regulation 8);
- (d) the enjoyment and achievement standard (see regulation 9);
- (e) the health and well-being standard (see regulation 10);
- (f) the positive relationships standard (see regulation 11);
- (g) the protection of children standard (see regulation 12);
- (h) the leadership and management standard (see regulation 13);
- (i) the care planning standard (see regulation 14).

The Independent Visitor continues to be expected to provide a report following each visit. Part six, regulation 44 of the Children's Homes Regulations provides for the reporting of the standards.

The Regulation 44 report maintained its format providing a succinct summary of the homes under the signs of safety headings. The recommendations following each visit are noted under two headings. Under the 'What needs to happen' the Visitor notes all the difficulties, shortfalls that have been observed during a particular visit. Some of these issues, the ones that may have potential significant impact on the young people or may represent a risk, are reiterated under the formal Recommendations section. Also issues that have been consistently raised under 'What needs to happen' but not acted upon by the homes may also become a Recommendation. The use of two tiers allows for an approach that signals any potential difficulties, including one-off matters in time for the home to consider and address timely, before it becomes a problem. The Recommendations therefore gain more weight and represent the urgency and importance of it being acted on without delay. For a period a slightly modified version was trialled, where the recommendations tier had been removed, but maintained the 'What needs to happen' tier, however it is felt by the visitors that valuable information that did not represent immediate concerns, got left behind and as a result it is currently being reviewed again to ensure that all information is given its rightful place and no information is missed or lost in the format of the report.

In line with feedback from OFSTED a statement regarding safeguarding is added to each report to reflect the Reg 44 officers' judgement regarding the welfare of the children and the children being safeguarded during each visit.

The structure of the report conclusion has been revised to ensure that actions identified as needing to happen are clearly outlined with timescales to ensure they are monitored and completed with a clear audit trail.

Covid 19 Pandemic March 2020

In Lincolnshire visits to homes were temporarily suspended on the 18th March till further guidance received, due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Independent Visitor

Since September 2019, Regulation 44 visits continued to be undertaken by two Independent Chairs (Visitors) following the retirement of David Proudlove (Visitor). Dawn Oldroyd and Eska Verleg share the visiting duties to the 7 homes, by visiting 4 and 3 homes respectively for a consecutive 4-6 months, after which the two Visitors will change homes for a further 4-6 months period. They have also continued to visit and report on the supported living scheme in Grantham providing accommodation in two houses for 5 young people aged 16-18 for a period of up to six months. There has also been the launch of a similar supported living scheme in Gainsborough. Both accommodations will be inspected under the Regulation 44 process however this is 'a lighter touch' exercise every 4 months. A report has been devised to reflect this approach.

Update: Ildiko Kiss returned from maternity leave and resumed management oversight of the Regulation 44 scheme until January 2020 when Paul Fisher resumed the position of permanent Team manager.

Independednt Chair Cheryl Govier will become a part of the Visitor team and in March started her induction.

Monthly visits have continued within timescales and Dawn and Eska maintain positive working relationships with care home managers, staff and young people. The consistency has enabled them to allay worries and concerns regarding the inspection process, working collaboratively to highlight what's working well and address issues within the homes that contribute to the effective care of the young people. The Visitors have continued to observe shift handovers, team meetings and key worker team discussions to gain further insight into practice within the homes. Weekend visits and conducting visits on different days and different times and around festive events have been beneficial in reflecting the home routines and dynamics. The Visitors speak with key stakeholders including the young people, parents, social workers, health and education partners and other relevant individuals to gain a holistic appraisal of the homes.

Dawn and Eska continue to maintain positive and honest working relationships with all the home management teams. Visitor reports reflect the implementation of Signs of Safety across the authority, in the summary highlighting: what's working well, what we're worried about, what needs to happen (good practice suggestions, emerging issues, matters in progress). This ensures consistency of practice within a framework that all staff utilise within children's services. Recommendations from previous reports are reviewed to ensure that progress is being made within reasonable timescales, where issues remain outstanding Visitors continue to challenge Home

Managers to ensure these are being addressed, additionally the Regulated Homes Service Manager has sight of all reports ensuring additional support can be given if required. Progress in respect of Social Pedagogy (SP) and Restorative Practice (RP) are also reflected within the reports and successes highlighted. Whilst all the homes are at different stages in terms of training and implementation, this oversight continues to ensure that all the homes are promoting and continuously developing in their implementation of these approaches and growing in confidence, whilst promoting good practice.

The dispute resolution procedure continues in place, ensuring that any disagreements are resolved in a timely manner between the Independent Review service and senior managers for the care homes. The process enables the Visitor to retain independence as the process is overseen at an Assistant Director level. This has been used effectively over the last 6 months whereby issues have been resolved efficiently.

The Visitors have attended one Homes Manager Meeting and this was felt to be a positive contribution and the hope is to continue this on a more regular basis to promote the role of the Visitor and to discuss thematic issues arising amongst the homes countywide.

The visitors planned to attend training in April of this year for Reg 44 visitors across the country. However sadly this was cancelled in March due to the Covid 19 pandemic. The hope is to attend the training once this is rescheduled after the restrictions have been lifted. Going forward the plan is to create opportunities to observe other Independent Visitors and visit other homes from neighbouring areas and share examples of good practice with the aim of continuing to develop the Regulation 44 procedures and practice in Lincolnshire. Plans to promote and develop a forum for Reg 44 officers in the Midlands have also been postponed but will be progressed further once restrictions have been lifted.

The voice of the child

Across the service the homes are very good at promoting communication between staff and young people and involving them at all stages using different tools and approaches. All the homes continue to promote display boards that celebrate the voice of the child through 'Voice of the child' and 'You said we did' creative displays. This provides an opportunity for children, professionals and families to enjoy the children's feedback.

Northolme and Eastgate have also done bespoke pieces of work with the children to feed into the Big Conversation regarding more appropriate language to use when we work with children accessing the service. Northolme also informed the process – identifying furniture and soft furnishings as well as looking specifically at things that will be reassuring and helpful to families spending their first night away from familiar surroundings, accessing a new service. The feedback was helpful and practical and an e-mail was sent back to the home to inform the children involved that this will be used in setting up this service.

The Beacon uses activity and planners using visual aids that the children are able to recognise as they have been involved in developed the PECS (pictorial aids for communication). They are promoting training for staff and have a clear plan in place to develop this skill and to ensure the child's voice is reflected in written documentation. They have also undertaken work with all the

young people to gain their wishes for a feature wall in their own bedrooms so it is reflective of their choice.

Within the Lincolnshire Secure Unit the young people continue to inform the multi-disciplinary meeting through their own contribution forms and the Risk Manager enables them to identify their own themes and views which encompass a wide range of topics from summer activities to health issues to how they can develop gym and sporting equipment.

Strut House consistently and routinely use a variety of alternative and preferred methods such as Makaton, PECS and iPads. The staff continue to celebrate the children's voice and also inform new ways of communicating with the children, starting in the induction process to the services. The young people at Strut House have had access to a wide range of activities and experiences throughout the holidays and there are photographic displays throughout the home demonstrating the children's wishes and feelings.

The voice of the child is extremely well represented in reports across the service. Albion Street are currently developing their service in relation to this and the new staff team is supported to develop skills in accessing the voice of the child, this to inform their practice and also to capture this in reports and paperwork. The children are also actively involved in decorating their own rooms and choosing new furnishings for the home- developing a sense of ownership.

Strut House have received some funding recently and they allocated part of the money to purchasing some sensory equipment. Haven Cottage have developed a sensory garden for the young people to have a calm and reflective space and also have the additional use of a summer house which is accessible to all the young people for sensory experiences during the daytime and night.

Within the Lincolnshire Secure Unit, the young people have been confident and vocal in sharing their views with the Visitor and this has been strongly supported by the staff members and responded to favourably by the management team. This has been in relation to whole group issues as well as individual issues and concerns. There was evidence of follow through of actions and the young people clearly felt listened to.

Throughout the majority of the homes there is more evidence of "You said we did" boards and some of the outcomes are reflected within residents meetings. Most of the homes actively promote the compliments and complaints processes (raising day to day issues) and there is very good evidence of the process working and there being a timely response to the young person.

In 2019 one of the young people raised their worry about their experience at Albion Street with Ofsted, leading to an early review.

In both Northolme and Albion Street, children have been supported by staff to make a formal complaint with police due to inappropriate behaviours towards them by another young person resulting in positive restorative work being completed with all parties involved. Social Pedagogy is delivered and recorded to different extents in the homes across the county, with some homes practice being more embedded. Northolme continues to be particularly good with SP work and RP is also part of the ethos in this home.

Eastgate also continue to deliver work that is of an exceptionally high standard and continues to develop this across all areas also informing independence work with the children and Young people of all ages.

Haven Cottage have now started the SP and R P approach and this has featured within their team development day. The team have agreed plans of how to promote SP and RP in a complimentary fashion in terms of recording incidents and reports to inform care planning.

Northolme already has established practice with regards to restorative incident reports and Strut are in the process of developing a restorative/reflective approach to recording incidents. Whilst Strut House initially expressed an uncertainty about how restorative practice could be developed in their service, they soon found a practical approach to the work and both SP and RP is well embedded in their practice using effective means of communication as the basis of their practice and also ensuring all work are informed by detailed planning.

The Independent Advocacy service attend all homes although there have been some delays in sharing reports at times due to staffing and capacity. New advocates have been appointed and they have now been introduced to the staff and the children across the service. Visit dates are recorded in home files and reports are kept in files. The quality of the work has been raised with several managers and this has been taken up with the Advocacy managers and is monitored closely by the home managers and the Independent Visitors. Visitors have adopted a range of skills and activities to engage with the young people in the homes, including one to one discussions, group discussions, playing with young people and enjoying activities in order to gain their voice.

Quality of care

The children within the homes continue to receive a good quality of care. There have been some significant challenges for some care homes regarding the on-going recruitment of staff at a variety of levels, from RCO1 to Homes Manager. Albion Street and The Beacon in particular have done well in recruiting a predominantly new staff team with the main emphasis now being on training and developing confidence amongst the staff team and a consistent way of providing quality of care across the team. Strut House has struggled over the past months with significant changes across the staff team. The RCO3's and the seconded Assistant Team Manager, with the help of Dave Clarke and senior management, have done well (and worked very hard) in ensuring continued quality in delivering the service to the children accessing their short breaks. It however continues to be a priority to secure a permanent management and staff team with a great emphasis on, and prioritising, recruitment.

In some homes there is a bank of regular agency and relief workers who have had access to focussed training and support. This has enabled some homes to develop a consistent staff group where the young people have been able to form a rapport and the staff have had the opportunity to become well accustomed with the home routines. It has become clear to the Visitors that a stable and permanent management and staff team is an essential foundation for providing settled homes and quality care to the young people and this has proven to be quite a struggle for some of the homes during this report period.

Staff and managers have ensured that they have been flexible in covering staffing vacancies, going the extra mile to ensure that young people's daily activities and routines aren't compromised. It has been positive to see the involvement of all staff within the home taking part in the care of young people.

There is good quality training being delivered and also access to a range of courses to aid the on-going development of staff including:

- recording skills training alongside staff from other children's home to develop skills in day to day recording requirements
- Therapeutic Crisis Intervention training is underway to ensure all staff are up to date with their training.
- Restorative Practice training is to be delivered in-house imminently.
- Social Pedagogy training has been delivered in house to have maximum amount of staff trained and skilled.

There is also tailored training for specific homes such as healthy living or to meet an individual children's needs, such as a CAMHS Psychologist delivering training within a team meeting focusing on the impact of trauma on a child's development. Northolme has continued to develop their service by promoting mindfulness whilst Eastgate continues to provide excellent support to the children in developing Independence tailored to all children's individual needs and across all aspects of life.

There has been positive use of Signs of Safety planned mapping exercises with staff members, some are routinely delivered within team meetings to reflect on individual young people's needs. The secure unit have benefited from one staff member being allocated to develop the key work sessions, particularly focusing on signs of safety and RP and this has made a marked improvement in ensuring quality and frequency of key work sessions in the home.

All the homes are able to evidence multi-agency partnership working and there are routinely contributions from health, police, school, social care and other agencies, undertaken through scheduled monthly meetings and ad hoc communications. The Police and PCSO presence within the homes in a preventative manner is evident in the mainstream homes, building the trust between the young people and police and also the relationship with the staff and police. There is an openness to invite other professionals and agencies into the homes to meet the needs of the young people. Such examples are on-going multi professional risk management meetings that are well attended by all teams.

Home staff follow through with procedures and routinely contact 111, GP's, Pharmacies and specialist health providers where there have been health issues or concerns regarding medication. Medication discrepancies have been appropriately managed and used as an opportunity for effective individual and group learning to minimise the risk of reoccurrence. Young people are routinely taken to standard GP, dentist and optician appointments as well as specialist consultant appointments. There has been a drive on general healthy living across the homes. Albion Street is currently progressing through a plan of significant renovations. Both Beacon and Albion are in the process in developing a more homely and welcoming atmosphere through new features and soft furnishings.

There is evidence that staff continue to attend EPEPs, EHCP reviews, sports days and parents evenings, they routinely engage with teaching staff regarding individual young people to ensure that their educational needs are being met. There is also evidence of staff advocating for the young person when their educational needs are not being met. There have been examples of young people having additional support from Positive Futures and mainstream schools being creative in their delivery of education and promoting attendance. Staff members have planned ahead during holiday periods to promote the transition from primary schools to secondary, or from establishment to establishment. During this time of nationwide lockdown there is a significant drive of both care and

educational staff to work together to ensure the children continue to access appropriate education, continue to attend school where possible and if not, to access well planned educational packages of support. The homes each offer a variety of activities for the young people to meet their needs and interests. The homes have a well-established routine of activities both in and outside the home which promote social inclusion and experiences. Albion Street is currently developing this with the new staff team with staff coming forward and taking the lead on activities and developing new initiatives such as promoting healthy lifestyles. All activities are well risk assessed and even if there are incidents during the activity there is an emphasis on reflecting and reviewing the risk assessment to ensure the young person can still participate rather than withdraw the activity. The homes provide a good variety of activities and actively promote independence where they can and encourage community participation, develop the young people's interests and positive social interactions with peers such as visiting friends after school for tea. Whilst plans at Strut at times had to be changed due to staff availability, efforts have been made to ensure the children continue to have a varied experience and if time out in the community is not possible, time is well planned and used in the home, using the space indoors effectively and creatively.

The young people are also enabled to go on extended trips within the UK or abroad and they have enjoyed a wonderful Christmas and half term. Engaging in a variety of activities and also going to the caravan at Butlins. Some homes, such as Northolme are also supporting the children to engage in free community activities as much as possible, leaving paid activities as a treat or an exception. This is to help the children to keep a realistic view of adult life and developing their ability to seek out activities that is available and at hand whilst still having a lot of fun.

Eastgate have developed their outside space adding a bike track and the garage has been changed into a bike workshop where they not only have a lot of fun but also learn a lot of valuable skills and build their confidence.

There is a significant refurbishment underway at Albion Street which has been somewhat delayed in being completed. The new kitchen has been completed and the bright lime green Kitchen brightens up the space. Some of the work planned is waiting for the fire doors to be fitted and this has contributed to a significant delay as the doors had to be specially made for the home. The plans were for the doors to be completed by end of March 2020 and then to be fitted in April 2020 how. The children's rooms have mostly been completed and at least two children have spoken very positively about their 'Own Space'. The laundry has been completed to a high standard and once the doors have been fitted, the carpets will be put down and then the re-decoration will follow.

Northolme has also struggled with fitting appropriate fire doors. Once again the doors had to be ordered to be made to fit. The plans were for the doors to be ready end of March and then to be fitted in April. The home has recently welcomed their new Handy Man and this is a very positive contribution to the team, specifically allocated to this home. The homes seek to ensure that the home environment is clean, well-kept and ultimately safe for the young people. The handyman role has been subject to a restructure whereby they now have a county wide remit so the homes have daily access to maintenance support according to their needs and this is now centrally managed by the manager at the secure unit.

Strut House have extended their exceptional work and support to providing full time care for one young person for a period of time, before preparing him for his transition into specialist long term

care. During this time the home also provided him with space to access education and the home's staff worked closely with educational staff to ensure he continues to access education whilst feeling nurtured and supported in a familiar space. This has had an impact on the other young people accessing the service as capacity has had to be reduced due to the extent of his challenging behaviours, however there is a multi-disciplinary plan in place to move him on to longer term accommodation at the earliest opportunity.

Social Pedagogy and Restorative Practice

Social Pedagogy (SP) and Restorative Practice (RP) is evident within all of the homes to varying degrees, being on the visual display boards and individualised to the child within the home. New staff that join the teams continue to access the training at hand and also engage with support within the teams through the home champions to ensure the practice is embedded and they grow in confidence and skill. SP is used alongside RP to reflect on daily activities and providing a structure for focussed work with the young person following an incident. This is developing in each home and it is fair to say that the homes are at different stages of development in terms of implementing restorative practice. Its use is being aligned with the young persons targets and care plans in order to embed this into the day to day interactions with staff and activities. Staff are reporting that this is complimenting their practice rather than being seen as a standalone piece of work and they are seeing the benefits of linking behaviours to feelings and reflecting on their contribution to dynamics and relationships. It is positive to see the enthusiasm of the champions within the homes, notably Strut House, Eastgate, Northolme and Haven Cottage , and the way in which they are driving developments within and between the homes.

The SP ethos and practices have provided an outlet for a more structured and reflective practice within the staff teams although some homes are at quite an early stage of embedding practice. It is instrumental in supporting the development of deep and meaningful relationships between the staff members and the children/young people and a focused method to support the young people with emotional difficulties.

Challenges

Visits are conducted on a monthly basis, there have been challenges in ensuring that the written reports are completed and fed back in a timely manner, this continues to be a focus for improvement for the visitors.

In respect of planned moves, there is good evidence of risk assessments and matching of children within the homes being undertaken and impact assessments being appropriately used in respect of decision making. This is essential to maintaining stability within the homes however there is some concern in relation to the impact of emergency placements, the mix of young people and their individual needs has continued to present a real challenge for some of the homes during the reported time period. The need to accommodate some young people at short notice has created an additional complexity to the dynamics of the group and whereby particular young people have been challenging and their behaviour has impacted on the staff and young people already residing in the

homes in particular at Albion Street. This has led at times to a chaotic living environment with physical damage to the home environment as well as a negative impact on the other children and injuries to staff. Staff have shown resilience in responding to these issues.

The registered manager at Albion Street in particular has given significant consideration to the cohort of children and aligning it with the completed impact and risk assessments over the last 4 months to address challenges experienced over the last year.

Staffing of the children's homes remains one of the on-going challenges addressed through rolling recruitment and more targeted advertising. HR and the home managers have reviewed the recruitment process and media used during advertisements and has had some success using additional social media to attract local interest. The wording and lay-out of advertisements have also been updated and pictures will also be used in the future to make the advertisements more appealing whilst true.

Ofsted inspections

All of the children's homes are subject to Ofsted inspection. Each home is subject to twice yearly inspections, ordinarily there will be a full inspection annually followed by an interim inspection approximately six months later.

The **Lincolnshire Secure Unit** had an Inspection on the 4 to 5th February 2020

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
Outcomes in education and related learning activities	good

The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Albion Street had an inspection on: 12th December 2019

Inspection date: 12 December 2019

Date of last inspection: 6 August 2019

Judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

The Beacon, which provides care for children with special needs, had an inspection on 27 to 28 August 2019.

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account: good

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 9 April 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Northolme was subject to an inspection on the 12 and 13 February 2020

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account good

How well children and young people are helped and protected requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 5 December 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Haven Cottage, which offers short term care to children with special needs, was last subject to a full inspection.

Inspection dates: 6 to 7 January 2020

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account outstanding

How well children and young people are helped and protected outstanding

The effectiveness of leaders and managers outstanding

The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people who need help protection and care.

Date of last inspection: 3 September 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Strut House, a short term unit for children with special needs had an inspection on the 6, 7 January 2020 and continue to be awarded an Outstanding grading.

Eastgate was subject to an OFSTED Rating of the Home from the last inspection Outstanding:
Inspection dates: 27 to 28 January 2020

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account

outstanding

How well children and young people are helped and protected

outstanding

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

outstanding

The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people who need help, protection and care.

Date of last inspection: 17 October 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Conclusion

Overall the homes provide good if not in some instances exceptional levels of care for the young people in their homes. There is an ethos of reflective practice and approaches within the homes; they ensure that learning is shared across the team. The use of champions ensures that practice is continually updated and promoted rather than being lost.

Staff teams have been resilient and remained motivated even when staffing issues and management of young people have caused additional challenges. The recruitment process has been consistently used and staff have assisted between homes at times of need to ensure safe levels of care. Homes continue to promote positive practice and strive for positive outcomes for the young people in their care.

The staff and manager's commitment to providing good quality care to the young people in spite of the challenges is to be commended and is consistently evident across the service.

There is the enthusiasm to develop the role of the Independent Visitor through engagement with Ofsted and engaging at a regional and national level.