

**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL
 23 JANUARY 2020**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR D BRAILSFORD (CHAIRMAN)

Lincolnshire County Council: Councillors Clio Perraton-Williams (Vice-Chairman), A G Hagues and M A Whittington

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

attended the meeting as observers

Officers in attendance:-

Kieran Barnes (Virtual School Head Teacher), John Harris (Head of Regulated Services - Fostering), Katrina Hewitt (Project Officer Participation Team, Young Inspectors), Ben Lilley (Team Manager, Quality and Standards), Janice Spencer OBE (Interim Director of Children's Services), Daniel Steel (Scrutiny Officer) and Rachel Wilson (Democratic Services Officer)

36 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R L Foulkes, S R Parkin and R Trollope-Bellew.

An apology for absence was also received from Ann Wright, Foster Carer.

37 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor M A Whittington wished it to be noted that his son was in receipt of services from Barnardo's.

38 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 NOVEMBER 2019

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2019 be agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

39 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR AND LEAD OFFICER

The Chairman advised that the Haven Children's Home for respite had again achieved an Ofsted rating of outstanding. It was noted that this Home repeatedly achieved outstanding. This was difficult to achieve, but even harder to maintain.

Councillor A G Hagues advised that he had visited Eastgate in Sleaford again and continued to be impressed by the staff and the children, as well as the atmosphere in the home. However, he also commented that there regularly seemed to be new members of staff.

40 YOUNG INSPECTORS PROJECT UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report which provided the Corporate Parenting Panel with a summary and overview of activities with the Lincolnshire Young Inspectors Project.

It was reported that Young Inspectors was a Lincolnshire County Council project which comprised of young people from across the County aged between 11 and 19 (25 if they had any SEND or were care-leavers) who volunteered to undertake inspections to offer feedback and evaluation.

The Young Inspectors project gave young people positive opportunities and support to become active volunteers. By carrying out various types of inspections of services used by young people across the County, Young Inspectors helped to improve the services offered in order to promote active change which would benefit other young people, children and families.

There were currently two meeting bases located at Lincoln and Grantham which met monthly to discuss and plan inspections. The majority of inspection work was carried out during half term.

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

- There was currently a group of around 25 young people who were really active.
- It was confirmed that the Professional Judgement Conference was held at Bishop Grosseteste College.
- It was commented that this was a very comprehensive report and a fantastic scheme, and as members should be doing everything possible to support it.
- Being a Young Inspector provided the young people with some good future skills.
- It confirmed that they were volunteers and so were not paid for their time. However, they were rewarded with activity days. In 2019 they went to Flamingo Land, and an overnight residential stay was planned for this year. These trips were a reward, but they also improved the young people's team building skills.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted

41 VOICES FOR CHOICES (V4C) UPDATE REPORT

Consideration was given to a report which provided a summary and overview of activities with regard to V4C between October and December 2019. V4C was Lincolnshire's Children in Care Council with the aim being to share experiences of being looked after in Lincolnshire and to inform teams who support Looked After children what does and does not work for them. V4C meetings were held within Children's Services locality quadrants and were delivered by Senior Youth and Community Development Workers and supported by Children's Services Participation Officers.

The report also provided the Corporate Parenting panel with an update with regard to the planning and progress that had taken place to develop V4C in terms of utilising new and alternative venues and activities to those that had been historically used.

Members were guided through the report and 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:

- The overall message was that there had been attendances across the whole county on an ongoing basis. There had been 100 attendances over this reporting period which was the first time that numbers had reached treble figures.
- Anecdotal evidence suggested that there had been increased interest from the flyers which had been produced.
- It was commented that it was positive how quickly the attendance had turned around, and thanks were extended to the Team for their work on this.
- It was noted that the budget was so far ok for this financial year, and there was a little flexibility with some of the other participation budgets if required.
- In terms of the variety of different activities that were being arranged, it was confirmed that they were all risk assessed prior to the events taking place.
- It was commented that the increase in attendances was very positive, and as soon as the meetings were moved from the youth centre space, people were more interested in attending.
- It was reported that there was interest from young people wanting to attend events in different areas to their own.
- It was highlighted that if any Panel members wanted to attend one of these meetings then officers would let them know when they were being held.
- It was commented that the increased attendances must have revitalised the team, and it confirmed that it had as it had enabled youth workers to deliver different activities in different places and helped them to better understand their geographical areas.
- It was queried what the Designated Teacher Conference was, and the Panel was advised that every school had a teacher responsible for Looked After Children or previously Looked After Children, and each year a conference was held which they were invited to attend.

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- It was suggested that with young people wanting to attend events outside their area, whether having a big group event had been considered, possibly on the coast. The Panel was advised that the Big Conversation would bring everyone together three times per year, but a big event could be considered.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted and the Team thanked for their work in increasing the attendances.

42 PERMANENCE AND PLACEMENT STABILITY

It was reported that the Corporate Parenting Panel had oversight of issues pertaining to children who were cared for by the authority and reviewed a number of the key performance indicators relating to children who were looked after. At a recent meeting of the Panel held in October 2019, the issue of placement stability were raised. A request was made that a report be prepared for the Panel setting out the issues relating to the performance data for placement stability. There was also a request to provide information as to what impact placement resources has had on the placement stability.

There were two performance indicators which measured placement stability as follows:

- NI062 – The percentage of children who are looked after with three or more placement moves in a twelve month period.
- NI063 – The percentage of looked after children (aged under 16) who have been looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years and have remained in the same placement for at least two years, or are placed for adoption and their adoptive placement together with their previous placement together last for at least 2 years.

It was reported that placement stability and permanence were interlinked, and there was a consistent number of young people who had stability. Indicator NI063 had fluctuated, but some information could be discounted as children looked after were allowed 21 days of respite each per year. These periods of respite were not counted as placement moves. It was also noted that one of the foster carers had moved house, and this had showed as a negative move for the child even though they remained with the foster carer.

The Panel was advised that retention payments had been brought in for foster carers, and it was believed that this had given those who were feeling undervalued some recognition. It was acknowledged that this would not prevent foster carers leaving for reasons to do with age, health or life events.

The panel 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:

- It was queried whether if the trend for losing foster carers continued, had it been considered that there may be a need for more accommodation in children's homes if there were fewer foster carers. Members were advised that this was not just about numbers, as it was recognised that there was a group of children who did not function in families. Investing in residential provision was a national trend.
- It was noted that there were so many individual stories, so a one size fits all approach would not work. Over the last 3 – 4 years there had been an increasing complexity of needs in children. In recognition of this, the authority was investing in in-house children's homes provision. These would be small, three bed, therapeutic units and would require a high level of staffing. There would be psychological support as well as speech and language therapists. There was a four year plan, and it was hoped to open the first home in 2020, and then another the following year. The independent market was not meeting the needs of these children.
- An open meeting was held for those people considering becoming foster carers, an activity day with social workers was also held where people could view profiles of some of the children.
- It was commented that fostering was a very controlled process, as was the matching process. It could be extremely challenging, but also rewarding.
- A member commented that after visiting Denton Avenue, the age group seemed to be getting slightly older, and it was queried whether the authority was going to end up in a position where there were more children still in residential care due to a reduction in the number of foster carers. Members were advised that the pressure was more likely to be from younger children as the authority was now better placed than ever before to manage the 16+ age group.
- It was noted that some children in residential care did go back to their birth families. Fostering was not always the best option for a child.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted and that the Corporate Parenting Panel endorsed the work being undertaken.

43 MEETING THE SUFFICIENCY DUTY 2018 - 2022 ANNUAL UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report which presented an annual update on the Action Plan of the Looked After Children Placement Sufficiency Strategy – 'Commissioning Excellence: Meeting the Sufficiency Duty 2018-2022'.

It was reported that the Strategy was signed off by the Corporate Parenting Panel in December 2017 with the recommendation to report annually against the Action Plan (attached as Appendix A to the report). The Action Plan had been updated to reflect progress against the actions up to and including the end of December 2019. Each action was evaluated using a Signs of Safety approach showing what had been

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accomplished, where there were concerns and what needed to happen next. A number of actions had been marked as 'completed' with an accompanying explanation.

The Panel was guided through the Action Plan document and completed actions highlighted. The panel was also 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 queried how many vacancies there were for carers at children's homes, and if some homes were not fully staffed did this cause undue strain for the remaining staff. One member also commented that when they visited Sleaford there always seemed to be new staff and it was queried whether there was any difficulty retaining some of the carers. Members were advised that there had been some turnover of staff in children's homes over the last 12 – 18 months. For example, at Eastgate, some of the staff had been there a long time, but had recently retired, and there had been some staff sickness. However, in terms of staffing this was one of the most stable homes. The Beacon had always been difficult to recruit to, but it was now fully staffed. The authority was constantly recruiting for these positions. It was also noted that there were a number of floating staff who were fully trained who could cover if staff were off sick, rather than relying on relief staff.
- It was commented that these children needed continuity and stability and it was queried whether rapid turnover of staff was unsettling to them. Members were reassured that all staff were trained to a level to provide continuous care.
- The demand for supported accommodation in the Grantham area was fairly stable.
- In terms of the proposal for smaller units, it was queried whether existing LCC properties would be considered, and it was confirmed that they would be and officers were working with corporate property and had carried out an initial search. The purchasing of a property was also being considered.
- It was queried what significant changes had been made to the Barnardo's contract, and members were informed that the main changes were around early allocation and transition from being a Looked After Child to a care leaver. Following stakeholder engagement it had become clear that the relationships the child had with their social worker etc. were very important and if the young person was well supported they could benefit from moving to the leaving care service earlier. However, this would be needs led and young people would now be able to transition from age 16. It was anticipated that there would be a spectrum of support. It was expected that the majority of young people would be ready to transition at 16, but the service would be much more about what the young person needed to get them to a strong position around independence.
- It was commented that it was good news that the caring2learn scheme would receive funding again, however, it was queried why it was only one year funding. Members were advised that funding came from the government and work had commenced on how to mainstream this service as cost neutral going forward. The value and benefits of the scheme were recognised by many. It would be known before April 2021 whether it was possible to incorporate this

permanently on a cost neutral basis, if this could not be retained on a cost neutral basis there would be a need for some difficult conversations. However, there was a lot of detailed work taking place around this.

RESOLVED

That the updated Action Plan be noted and that the Panel endorse the work being undertaken.

44 ADOPTION SERVICE SIX MONTH REVIEW (APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 2019)

Consideration was given to a report which informed the Corporate Parenting Panel about the work of the Adoption Service in accordance with the requirements of the Care Standards National Minimum Standards 2003, 2011, 2014 and the Adoption and Children Act 2002. The National Minimum Standards, together with the Adoption Regulations, for the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Agencies.

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.

It was reported that the National Minimum Standards for the Adoption Service were broken down into 31 standards. Standard 17 dealt with the monitoring and controlling and required the Executive Councillor to satisfy themselves that the Adoption Agency was effective and achieved good outcomes for children. There was a statutory requirement to report this information to the Panel.

The Interim Director of Children's Services provided the panel with an update on the progress with forming a regional adoption agency (RAA). The DFE continued to support proposed RAA's and it was noted that the D2N2 (Nottinghamshire, Nottingham City, Derbyshire and Derby City) had gone live in April 2019 and the indication was that it was working well. Lincolnshire, Rutland, Leicester City and Leicestershire had become L3R and were developing partnership arrangements, as part of this a new role would be created, with a hub and spoke model. It was reported that there was a meeting on 31 January 2020 to finalise the details. Operationally, services had been realigned as a region including work on templates and training that was delivered, and some benefits were starting to be realised. It was also noted that discussions were taking place with North Lincolnshire Council who were interested in being part of this model (It was noted that North Lincolnshire was also rated as an outstanding adoption service).

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 the partnership that Lincolnshire was a part of, it was queried whether it would only get one assessment from government, and so was it more likely that Lincolnshire rating would go down rather than retaining the

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outstanding rating. It was confirmed that Lincolnshire would be inspected as a Regional Adoption Agency, and that there was a clause being written into the partnership that meant it could be dissolved due to poor performance of other partners. However, the authority would need to be part of a RAA in some form.

- There were concerns about whether the good work done in Lincolnshire could be affected by being in a RAA. The Panel was advised that one authority would need to be the lead authority and host authority, and Lincolnshire would put itself forward for this role.
- It was commented that it was positive that this would help other authorities. It was also noted that it would also provide a bigger pool of people for placements.
- It was noted that adoption orders had increased by 50% from the previous year, and the number of Special Guardianship Orders had decreased.

RESOLVED

That the Corporate Parenting Panel endorse the Adoption Service Six Month Review.

**45 THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL FOR LINCOLNSHIRE ANNUAL REPORT -
ACADEMIC YEAR 2018 - 2019 (JAN 2020)**

Consideration was given to a report which outlined the activity of the Virtual School Head Teacher, the Virtual School and reported on the 2019 educational outcomes for the county's looked after children. It reflected on achievements and identified areas of development to achieve the best outcomes for children in the authority's care.

The Panel was guided through the report and 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 queried whether the virtual school offered support outside of term time, and it was confirmed that support during the school holidays could be provided if requested, such as extra tuition. However, activities were also sometimes organised.
- With reference to the training events delivered by the Educational psychology team which focused on the impact of trauma on Looked After Children, it was noted that it was positive that these training events were being held.
- It was noted that there was a focus on emotional wellbeing, not just for children, but also for the professionals so they could help the children to understand themselves and also to be able to moderate their own behaviour.
- It was confirmed that the Virtual Head Teacher had been a statutory role since 2014.
- It was queried what the Virtual Head Teacher's greatest challenge was going forward, and also what was the greatest success so far. It was commented

that the greatest challenge was ensuring that people could access the support when they needed it and improving education outcomes, and that children were getting the right education at the right time. The greatest success was considered to be the fact the people knew what the Virtual school was and that it was fully integrated into Children's Services. The focus on education for children in care was a major step forward, and now the first conversations that a social worker would have with a child would be about education.

- It was also important that the young person was ready to accept education as well.
- The Panel was informed that the County Council currently had 632 Looked After Children.
- It was queried what progress had been made with reviewing the language that was used. The Panel was informed that this was an ongoing piece of work and an update would be provided at the next Big Conversation event. It was highlighted that there were some things that could be changed easily, but some others would be harder as they had to be reported to government.

RESOLVED

That the Corporate Parenting Panel endorsed the Virtual School Annual Report for the academic year 2018-2019.

46 CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report which enabled the Panel to comment on the content of its work programme for the coming year to ensure that scrutiny activity was focused where it could be of greatest benefit.

It was requested that the V4C quarterly report (December 2019 – February 2020) which was scheduled for the March meeting be moved to the 14 May 2020 meeting.

The Panel was reminded that the next meeting was scheduled for 12 March 2020.

RESOLVED

That the work programme for 2020 be approved, subject to the above amendment.

The meeting closed at 12.10 pm