

**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL  
12 MARCH 2020**

**PRESENT: COUNCILLOR D BRAILSFORD (CHAIRMAN)**

Councillors Clio Perraton-Williams (Vice-Chairman), R L Foulkes, A G Hagues, S R Parkin and M A Whittington

Councillors: attended the meeting as observers

Officers in attendance:-

John Harris (Head of Regulated Services - Fostering), Ben Lilley (Team Manager, Quality and Standards), Kerry Mitchell (Assistant Director Barnardo's (Lincolnshire)), Daniel Steel (Scrutiny Officer) and Rachel Wilson (Democratic Services Officer)

47 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor R H Trollope-Bellew

48 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

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

49 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 23 JANUARY 2020

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2020 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

50 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR AND LEAD OFFICER

The Chairman, on behalf of the Panel, congratulated Heather Sandy on her appointment as the Executive Director of Children's Services.

The Chairman reported that he had recently attended the Big Conversation in Louth, which was reasonably well attended.

51 OUTCOMES FROM THE 2019 - 20 TELL US SURVEY AND BIG CONSERVATION 20

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Consideration was given to a report which provided a summary and overview of two key elements of participation and engagement work within Children's Services over the last quarter period of the year:

1. Tell Us Survey: This was an annual survey designed to capture the views of children in the authority's care about various aspects of their care experience with the intention being to identify how services could be improved and ensured that children and young people had a forum to raise issues and concerns about their experience in order to help Children's Services develop support further where needed.
2. The Big Conversation: These events were held three times per year (February, May and October) and provided an opportunity for children in the authority's care to share their experience and help shape and improve care services. The Big Conversation meetings enabled children and young people from the four locally based Voices 4 Choices groups (Lincolnshire's Children in Care Council) to come together, also with care leavers to share their views on a range of topics and issues.

The Panel was advised that the Tell Us Survey had been undertaken in 2019 and had received 38 responses, and it was acknowledged that this was not a large amount of responses. Any responses which included 'I could do better' would be forwarded on to a social worker to follow up. It was reported that there were some very positive responses. The number of responses was lower than officers would have liked, but work was on going to improve responses in the future.

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:

- It was highlighted that there had been four responses answering 'could do better' to questions about 'your education' and 'your future' and it was queried whether it was possible that it was the same four young people responding. It was acknowledged that this was likely and would be flagged up to the social workers.
- It was suggested that next time the length of time the survey was open could be extended. Social workers had tried really hard to encourage young people to complete the surveys.
- There had been a suggestion of whether future survey's should just focus on a particular theme, and just ask four or five questions.
- In terms of the language used, it was noted that progress was being made, and the Council would be dropping use of the term 'Looked After Children' and replacing it with 'Children in Care'
- Members were concerned about the lack of responses, and it was queried whether there was an issue with the responses not being anonymised. However, members were advised that on the survey there was an option to make the responses anonymous.
- Members were encouraged to hear that any negative responses to survey questions were followed up by social workers.

- Concerns were expressed regarding the responses about not being aware of the virtual school, and the Panel was advised that this was being followed up with the Head of the Virtual School.
- It was highlighted that children in care would have meetings which included their social worker, designated teacher and other professionals, and they may not know what everyone's role was.
- A discussion took place regarding the importance of designated teachers and the role they played for children in care, and it was acknowledged that although all children in care would have a designated teacher, the child may not recognise that term. It was suggested it was more important that the child had someone outside the home they felt they could go to for support or advice.
- It was suggested that the language used with children should be changed, as officers were confident that children in care knew their designated teacher as a teacher. It was suggested that it would be better to ask children if they had someone at school they could go to if they needed help rather than asking if they knew who their designated teacher was.
- The LCHS representative advised that when children came for an assessment, they were asked if they knew who they could go to at school if they needed to speak to someone.
- It was noted that some services would send survey's out via text message, asking for a view by responding between 1 - 5 on a particular question.
- It was reported that the recent Big Conversation had followed on from the one held before Christmas 2019, where discussions about reviewing the language used had been taking place. Young people had highlighted that that 'Looked After Children' and 'respite' were terms that they did not like.
- It was queried how much input the young people would have in influencing the terms and the it was noted that they were able to feed in their views via V4C.
- Page 18 of the agenda pack, set out some suggested changes to terminology and it was noted that both the 'Care Plan' and 'Pathway Plan' would be known as 'Future Plan'. It was noted that a young person's view was they did not see a difference between them.
- In terms of the bullying aspect which had been recorded, it was queried what the current situation with this was, and if it was know why they were being bullied. It was noted that these responses has been escalated to the appropriate social workers. It was also suggested that the responses could have been referring to existing bullying situations which had not yet been resolved.
- It was highlighted that the 'Caring Promise' did not place any obligations on the child.
- It was noted that Barnardo's had a Leaving Care Charter, which was a two way responsibility between Barnardo's and the young person, of what could be expected. However, it was noted that this was in need of refreshing.
- One member commented that the care they gave their children was unconditional, and they would like the Care Pledge to also be unconditional, this was particularly important for younger children. However, it was acknowledged that clear boundaries, and each foster family would have their own boundaries which needed to be adhered to.

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- It was highlighted that there could be a big difference for young person from being 17 to turning 18. It was known that some 18 year olds did struggle with the transition to being an adult.
- It was highlighted that the Corporate Parenting Panel recognised the good work of the Participation Officers Rebecca Crooks, Andy Garbutt and Graham Reeve in relation to the Big Conversation.
- Page 25 of the agenda pack provided data on the type of house a young person lived in, and it was queried what the 8% 'other' would include. The Panel was advised that this was likely to be 16-18 year olds living in supported accommodation, secure accommodation or they may have been placed out of county.

**RESOLVED**

That the comments made in relation to the Tell Us Survey and Big Conversation be noted.

**52      QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

Consideration was given to a report which provided key performance information for Quarter 3 2019/20 that was relevant to the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

The Panel was guided through the report and members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions to the officers present in relation to the information contained within the report and one of the points raised made reference to page 40 of the agenda pack which highlighted that Serco were helping with the provision of work placements for young people leaving care. It was noted that when Serco were bidding for the service, they asked what else they could offer and so offered a number of work placements. A meeting with management at Serco was taking place later in the month to identify how these placements would be managed. Those young people that it was felt would most benefit from these placements would be handpicked to take part.

Work was taking place to make the County Council a foster carer friendly organisation, and officers were also working with other large organisations on this.

It was reported that generally performance was good, and officers were aware of the areas where performance was struggling and by the end of the year the number of immunisations would have improved.

**RESOLVED**

That the comments made in relation to the performance information presented be noted.

**53      LINCOLNSHIRE LEAVING CARE - SIX MONTH REPORT**

Consideration was given to a report which provided the six month review report to demonstrate the Lincolnshire Leaving Care Service in regard to care leavers (18-25 year olds). Areas covered within the report included accessing and maintaining suitable, safe accommodation; accessing and maintaining appropriate Education, Employment and Training opportunities; compliments and complaints; and Lincolnshire Leaving Care Contract.

It was noted that the report considered data from April to October 2019, and contract monitoring meetings were held monthly between Lincolnshire County Council officers and Barnardo's.

The Panel 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:

- It was confirmed that someone had been appointed to carry out influence and advice work as there was resource to fund this post, and there was a need to do more work with young people to ensure that their needs were being met in the way they wanted.
- The Panel was advised that co-operation with district councils had been good, and if there was a young person who wanted to go on the council housing register or receive council tax relief, the issues were resolved quickly.
- It was reported that district councils had been incredibly flexible, and were giving young people eight or nine choices for housing options, even though they were only required to provide one. Council tax relief for care leavers had also been a priority, but a variance still existed across districts at the age until which this could be claimed. Care leavers were also being given priority on housing lists.
- It was reported that a scheme was running in Scotland called 'Gap Housing', which Barnardo's was planning to roll out in England. Under this scheme, Barnardo's was given small parcels of land by local authorities, and Barnardo's would then build a small number of houses specifically for care leavers. They were hoping to build 50 of these houses in England. They would be small, one bedroom properties, and Barnardo's had partnered with Ikea to furnish them.
- It was reported that as part of the budget setting process, East Lindsey District Council had agreed to provide council tax relief to care leavers up to the age of 25. It was acknowledged that the County Council had asked districts to do this, and it was important to keep the pressure up for the remaining district councils.
- There were concerns around the criteria for level of need for mental health support, as there were reports that young people needed to be at crisis level before they could get any help.
- It was noted that one of the positives in relation to mental health services for Lincolnshire, was that the County Council commissioned the CAMHS service. There was a more gradual drop off of services for young people transitioning to adult services.
- It was noted that in terms of the council tax relief, the biggest financial impact would be on the county council.

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- It was noted that parents would help their children to manage paying bills etc. when moving to their own property and suggested that similar guidance should be available for care leavers moving into their own home.
- It was queried what the theme of the FAB awards and the Panel was advised it was the FAB Party, and it was planned to have live music, a silent disco, and the university were being asked to do the catering again, which would be a selection of party food.

**RESOLVED**

That the Lincolnshire Leaving Care Service Six Month Report be noted.

**54      FOSTERING REPORT - QUARTER 3**

The Corporate Parenting Panel received a report which provided members with the opportunity to review the third quarterly report for 2019/20. It was reported that the Annual Report for 2018/19 was presented to the Corporate Parenting Sub Group in September 2019. The Statement of Purpose had also been revised and was ratified on the same day.

The Panel was advised that the main issue was the recruitment and retention of foster carers. The experience which was being lost was not being replaced in the same way.

It was noted that a number of applications had been received from couples who both worked.

The Panel was informed that there were some fantastic carers, and cared for children with a range of complex needs, which would remain complex. It was also noted that there were also geographical challenges due to the rurality of the county.

It was noted that it was planned to target the Bourne area with recruitment campaigns during this year, as there was a good record of adoptive parents coming from that area.

The Caring2Learn programme had brought positive engagement for a lot of foster carers.

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 noted within the report that five of the applications for special guardianship orders were withdrawn, and it was queried if it was known why this was. The Panel was advised that this was possibly due to the impact on the applicants own children.
- It was queried what could be offered by the authority to encourage people to come forward as foster carers. However, it was noted that an allowance was received for fostering, and not many people could survive on one wage. It was important to have the right people doing the caring, for the right reasons.

- It was suggested whether the recruitment of respite carers could be looked at in order to retain long term carers.
- It was queried whether there was anything which could be learnt from independent agencies. However, it was noted that often the main attraction for foster carers registering with independent agencies was that they got paid more. It was thought that the majority of the authority's carers did not become foster carers for financial reward, but because they felt compelled to support Lincolnshire's children.. There were a number of cases where an enhanced payment would be made.
- Reference was made to the Mockingbird Model which had been implemented in Doncaster, and it was queried whether this had been considered for Lincolnshire. Members were advised the authority was trying to take some of the learning from that model, and apply it to Lincolnshire, such as looking at providing a more tangible out of hours support.
- It was noted that the benefit of SGO's were that it enabled people to provide care, that would not normally be thought of. It was suggested whether these SGO's should be retained as mainstream carers.
- It was also queried whether targeting 'empty nesters' as potential foster carers, was an option, as they were experienced parents and were more likely to have the time available.
- It was noted that there were foster carer champions, and they would work to find networks for people.
- It was highlighted that foster carers were often worried that if they did ask for help then it might be thought that they could not manage or carry out the role. It was very hard to get the message across that they would not be criticised for asking for help. It was suggested that sometimes all they needed was someone to listen to them.
- It was queried whether the foster carer champions were encouraged to contact the foster carers that they had not heard from in a while, and it was confirmed that this practice was in place. There was an aim to establish this relationship with every carer that had been through the Fostering Panel so they knew who they could go to for support.

## RESOLVED

That the report be accepted as an accurate overview of the Fostering Service.

## 55      UPDATE ON OUTCOMES OF OFSTED INSPECTIONS

Consideration was given to a report which provided the Corporate Parenting Panel with an update on outcomes of Ofsted inspections recently undertaken for Lincoln Strut House, Boston Haven Cottage and 91 Eastgate, Sleaford.

It was reported that all three children homes listed above were rated as outstanding, and it was commented that to achieve this rating was a great achievement, but to retain it was even harder.

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The Panel wished to express its thanks to the staff at each of these children's homes for doing an exceptionally good job.

It was noted that the manager from Haven Cottage, Boston had only returned from holiday the day of the inspection, which was an indication of the high quality of standards in place.

It was queried whether there was a need, as a Panel, to scrutinise the standard of care that children placed out of county were receiving. It was queried whether a report could be received on this at a future meeting.

The Chairman thanked Councillors Foulkes and Whittington as they would be attending Adoption Panels in the coming weeks, and it was requested that they provided an update on their experiences at a future meeting.

**RESOLVED**

1. That the update be noted.
2. That a report in relation to care received by children placed out of county be received at a future meeting.
3. That Councillors Foulkes and Whittington provide an update of their experience attending Adoption Panels at a future meeting.

**56      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.

**RESOLVED**

That the work programme for 2020 be approved.

The meeting closed at 11.51 am