

**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL
 14 JANUARY 2021**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR D BRAILSFORD (CHAIRMAN)

Lincolnshire County Council: Councillors Clio Perraton-Williams (Vice-Chairman), R L Foulkes, A G Hagues, Mrs J E Killey, R H Trollope-Bellew and M A Whittington

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

Officers in attendance:-

Amy Allcock (Senior Commissioning Officer), Kieran Barnes (Virtual School Head Teacher), Bridie Fletcher (Commissioning Officer), John Harris (Head of Regulated Services - Fostering), Nick Harrison (Democratic Services Officer), Katrina Hewitt (Project Officer Participation Team, Young Inspectors), Andrew Morris (Corporate Parenting Manager), Yvonne Shearwood (Children's Service Manager - Regulated (South and Adoption)), Janice Spencer OBE (Assistant Director of Children's Services Safeguarding) and Nigel West (Head of Democratic Services and Statutory Scrutiny Officer)

Also in attendance Lisa Adams (Service Manager, Barnardos), Jenny Harper (NHS Lincolnshire CCG) and Kerry Mitchell (Assistant Director Barnardo's (Lincolnshire)) attended the meeting as observers

(Councillor Perraton-Williams in the Chair in the temporary absence of the Chairman, Councillor D Brailsford who had experienced IT connection issues)

37 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

An apology for absence was received from Susan Ombler, Deputy Director of Nursing for Lincolnshire Community Health Service.

38 DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

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

39 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 26 NOVEMBER 2020

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2020 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

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AND LEAD OFFICERS**

(Councillor D Brailsford in the Chair)

The Chairman referred to minute 30 from the last meeting (Regulation 44 Independent Visiting Service) and requested that reference to 'the Fire Houses in Grantham' be known going forward as homes on Denton Avenue and not as 'the Fire Houses' which the Panel agreed to.

41 CHANGES TO THE INITIAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT

The Panel received an oral update from Gemma Cross, Lincolnshire Community Health Services NHS Trust and Jenny Harper, NHS Lincolnshire CCG, in relation to changes to the conduction of Initial Health Assessments and the developments put in place to mitigate these.

It had been reported at the last meeting that prior to the end of 2019, alternative ways of completing Initial Health assessments had been looked at and a proposal had been made for it to be a nurse led service and a paper was put together, however, this process was interrupted by Covid-19. Due to this GP's were no longer able to carry out these assessments, and so permission was sought for nurses to carry out these assessments by telephone, some face to face appointments took place during September and October, but now all assessments were back to telephone only and audited by the CCG. These processes, despite the CCG, had been challenged by Leicester and Nottinghamshire for being outside operational guidance and their view was that children should be seen face to face by GP's Guidance from the Royal Colleges also supported GP face to face assessments.

The Panel recognised the stresses the NHS was currently experiencing and that reports suggested that the nurse led process had achieved good outcomes for children and that this was the most important issue. The difficulties with the GP assessments were recognised especially during a pandemic. It was noted that the schools vaccination programme had experienced delays due to the pandemic.

Local authorities had been involved in discussions and a plan of action going forward had been drafted. Nurses would continue to undertake health and wellbeing checks and would ensure children received their health assessments in time. All those who had received a nurse led assessment had received a follow up call to check on their health. An evaluation of the nurse led model was currently being drafted and would be submitted to a future Panel meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

42 COMMISSIONING EXCELLENCE: MEETING THE SUFFICIENCY DUTY
2018-2022 ANNUAL UPDATE

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

Section 22G of the Children Act 1989, and the Statutory Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children (2010), placed a duty on Local Authorities to act strategically to address gaps in provision by ensuring that they included, in relevant commissioning strategies, their plans for meeting the sufficiency duty. The Strategy had been signed off by the Corporate Parenting Sub Group in December 2017 with the recommendation to report annually on progress against the Action Plan (Appendix A of the report). The Corporate Parenting Panel was invited to discuss and endorse the updated content of the Action Plan which outlined 39 actions and commented on what was working well, what the concerns were and what needs to happen in relation to each one.

Members were guided through the report and were provided with an 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:

- A member noted that there was a shortage of one bedroom accommodation and suggested officers look at whether military bases could be used which officers undertook to consider whether this was an option.
- It was suggested that there should be a national approach to Council Tax relief / exemption being given to care leavers. It was noted that there were plans for the Government to produce a document on this. The Panel requested an update on this to a future meeting.
- Discussion took place on the average age of people undertaking foster care which was 53 and it was noted that generally most carers fell into the 50 to 70 age bracket and that in the past the role had been seen as a life choice. Nowadays it was not uncommon for carers to come forward offering limited capacity with a view that it was not a life choice.
- There was a national shortage of foster carers, with 8000 places required.
- It was noted that the digital offer of keeping in touch and training, in particular had been vital during the pandemic and that the success of these processes would be reviewed. One notable success had been increased participation. Although virtual and remote learning had been advantageous and a good substitute, it was seen as an additional option and not a replacement for face to face feedback from young people going forward. A blended approach was seen as the most likely proposition in the future.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the updated Action Plan for the Sufficiency Strategy be supported and endorsed;

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- 2) The comments made by members, and outlined above, be considered by the Officers and where appropriate be reported back on to the Panel.

43 LINCOLNSHIRE VIRTUAL SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020

Consideration was given to a report from the Virtual School Headteacher, on an overview of services provided by the Virtual School to support the improvement of educational outcomes of Children in Care and those Previously in Care for the academic year 2019/20). The report covered the period 1 September 2019 to 31 August 2020.

The Department for Education (DfE) Statutory Guidance on Promoting The Education of Looked after Children and Previously Looked After Children (DfE 2018) required an annual report on the delivery of service and the outcomes achieved by children in care. In addition, the Local Authority (LA) required an annual report to provide a summary of the core activities relating to improving educational outcomes for Children in Care.

The Corporate Parenting Panel was asked to accept the Annual Report 2019/20 as an accurate reflection of services provided for Children in Care and support the recommendations contained within the report. These were outlined as follows:-

'The Virtual School would continue to promote improving educational outcomes for children and young people as outlined in the Lincolnshire Looked after Children and Care Leavers Strategy 2018-2021.

1. The Virtual School continue to ensure that all Personal Education Plans (PEPS) were high quality and effective with children's services staff, carers, children and schools working effectively and in partnership to promote wellbeing and learning. That the work of the Virtual School Team focus on supporting our children and young people to access effective support as we emerge from the Covid Emergency.

2. Children's Services to continue to develop a highly skilled, effective and innovative workforce across Lincolnshire focused upon improving educational outcomes for children and young people in care and to ensure that we build on the opportunities presented in the recent crisis in our work to fulfil our statutory duties in our extended role to support previously looked after children.

3. That we continue to develop an emotional wellbeing pathway to promote selfconfidence and support academic progress so that our children and young people are better understood and supported to fulfil their potential'.

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions to the officers present and some of the points raised included the following:

- The Panel welcomed the report and thanked all those staff involved in the service.
- There was no evidence of looked after children being excluded from schools for not being able to access a laptop. Laptops were being issued by schools and it was thought that the majority of them had some access to an electronic

learning device and that this situation was likely to improve in the coming months.

- It was thought that teachers were doing an excellent job under challenging circumstances and that according to reports most children had responded well to online learning. It was thought likely that the coming months would not be any less challenging. It was suggested that where possible a face to face meeting with a Form Teacher could be helpful as part of a general check on pupil progress and wellbeing. It was reported that this was already in practice in some schools either face to face or via VC.
- The broadband signal in some rural areas was a concern but was not seen as a major issue. Schools were working together to provide free data where possible.

RESOLVED: The Annual Report be accepted as an accurate reflection of services provided for Children in Care and supported the recommendations contained therein and outlined above.

44 YOUNG INSPECTORS PROJECT UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report from the Project Officer Lincolnshire Young Inspectors, on a summary and overview of activities with regard to Lincolnshire Young Inspectors project.

Young Inspectors was a Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) project that comprised of young people from across the County aged between 11 and 19 (25 if they had any Special Educational Needs and Disability (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 in order to benefit other young people, children and families.

The report outlined the project structure, completed inspection work in 2020 planned inspection work in 2021, and detailed other work carried out. Services and had a good number of volunteers actively engaging. It was noted that the project had produced a number of successful inspection reports which had promoted positive change. This had proved challenging during 2020 amidst the restriction of Covid-19 but the group had met regularly in order to sustain momentum and participation.

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions to the officers present and some of the points raised included the following:

- It was noted that Young Inspectors was a nationwide project and that there was some liaison between authorities about best practice.
- The development of a training day and induction were under review with consideration given to former Inspectors being invited to share their experiences in a peer led approach.

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- There had been some logistical challenges in inspecting children's centres. About 50% of centres had been inspected and consideration was being given to revisiting those centres inspected to share findings.
- Following a member suggestion, officers would look at whether it was possible to widen links to other organisations including Cub Scouts, sports clubs and the Air Cadets for example.
- Meetings were normally held in Lincoln or Grantham, and occasionally Boston, and it was suggested that these should be broadened out to include areas on the east coast, staff resources permitting.
- It was suggested that Young Inspectors should be invited to review and add questions to the Council's Tell Us Survey.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted
- 2) That officers consider the comments made by the Panel as outlined above.

45 LINCOLNSHIRE LEAVING CARE - SIX MONTHLY UPDATE REPORT

Consideration was given to a report from the Service Manager, Barnardo's Leaving Care Services, on a six monthly update provided by Barnardo's on behalf of Lincolnshire Leaving Care Service for April - September 2020. Areas covered within the report included: Barnardo's Response to Covid; Accessing and maintaining suitable, safe accommodation; Accessing and maintaining appropriate Education, Employment and Training opportunities; Compliments and Complaints; staffing establishment from April 2020.

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:

- The Panel welcomed the comprehensive and informative report.
- Links had been developed with housing teams and Housing Associations to discuss protocols and priorities.
- It was noted that at the beginning of 2020 negotiations had commenced with Serco who had provided a number of job opportunities across the region in partnership with the County Council. A 'Care Leavers Mentoring Scheme' had been developed and launched and currently had five young people benefitting from working with a mentor from Serco. It was suggested that consideration should be given to looking into whether it would be possible to include the University of Lincoln in the scheme. The scheme was currently a Pilot and would be reviewed shortly. It was hoped that the scheme could include as many companies and agencies as possible.

(Councillor M Whittington gave his apologies and left at this point in the meeting)

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

46 LONG-TERM MENTAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN IN CARE IN ENGLAND
RESEARCH PROJECT

The report from the Inspections and Special Projects Officer, on an overview of the Long-term Mental Health of Children in Care in England research project to date and planned future phases was deferred to a future meeting.

47 FOSTERING QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 2

Consideration was given to a report from the Children's Services Manager, on an overview of activity within the fostering service over Quarter 2.

It was noted that the development of the virtual foster care community, via Caring2Learn (C2L), had created a model for the future and additional payments had been made, to both value the work of foster carers and promote placement stability. Despite this, and reflective of the demography of foster carers within the County, up to 83 foster placements had been lost during the Covid pandemic as a result of self-isolation and vulnerabilities. At the end of Quarter 2, the number of children in care had continued to rise to 662. At the same time, those placed with Independent Fostering agencies had risen to 33, four of whom were unaccompanied migrant children. Amongst this group were two children placed who had waited for a long term placement for in excess of six months. 72 children became looked after for the first time in this quarter, of these 49 were placed in foster care.

The report covered information on recruitment and retention, marketing, virtual information events, a permanence campaign, the fostering friendly project, Retention / Caring2Learn / Our World Magazine, family finding training, kinship, Caring 2 Learn and assessments. The report also commented on what had worked well and what were the areas of concern.

In conclusion it was noted that Covid-19 had presented as some foster carers took themselves off line due to their own health vulnerabilities. As a result placement stability in this quarter had continued to be strong but placement availability had resulted in an increase in placements sought within the independent sector. The increase in care plans for permanent fostering had represented one of the most significant challenges for the Directorate as the number of plans continued to grow, whilst the recruitment of permanent foster carers remained worryingly low. Caring2learn continued to create the Foster care community and had established itself as a core framework for delivering the fostering 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:

- The toolkit for new carers, which included the standards from the Training Standards Development (TSD), had been well received. These were starting to come in for assessment resulting in carers receiving a Learning Homes Award with an expectation to resubmit a portfolio every three years to ensure on going personal and professional development. It was requested that the

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criteria for the assessments and Award be circulated to the Panel for information.

- Councillor R Foulkes volunteered to contact the Editor of the 'Stamford Living' publication with a view to discussing a possible article on fostering, following liaison with the dedicated media officer in the Fostering Service.
- It was noted that private fostering agencies used similar scrutiny and approval processes. Independent agencies were far more active in Lincolnshire and were able to offer a higher remuneration. It was reported that financial remuneration was not on its own a long term motivator in foster caring, especially as needs were often complex and the role was 24/7.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and accepted as an accurate overview of the Fostering Service.

48 CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report which provided the Panel with the opportunity to consider its work programme for the coming year to ensure that scrutiny activity was focused where it could be of greatest benefit.

The Head of Democratic Services and Statutory Scrutiny Officer, confirmed that he would re include the item deferred earlier in the meeting in the work programme - Long-term Mental Health of Children in Care in England Research Project. Consideration would also be given to the suggestion that the Panel should receive a report at a future meeting on its work over the last few years, including the improvements to services it had agreed to and any challenges faced.

The Chairman thanked Ryan Goodyear, IT, for resolving his connection issues during the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be noted as amended above.

The meeting closed at 12.42 pm