

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

11 MARCH 2021

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR D BRAILSFORD (CHAIRMAN)

Lincolnshire County Council: Councillors 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)

Lisa Adams (Service Manager, Barnardos) attended the meeting as observers

Officers in attendance:-

Kieran Barnes (Virtual School Head Teacher), Kiara Chatziioannou (Scrutiny Officer), John Harris (Head of Regulated Services - Fostering), Tracy Johnson (Senior Scrutiny Officer), Ben Lilley (Team Manager, Quality and Standards), Yvonne Shearwood (Children's Service Manager - Regulated (South and Adoption)), Janice Spencer OBE (Assistant Director of Children's Safeguarding) and Rachel Wilson (Democratic Services Officer)

49 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor C L Perraton-Williams.

50 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

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

51 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 JANUARY 2021

In relation to minute 47, Councillor R Foulkes advised that he had contacted the local newspaper, but at this time they would not be able to publish that sort of article. It was suggested that this could be picked up again once the pandemic was over, by the new Panel.

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2021 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

52 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR AND LEAD OFFICERS

The Chairman advised that this would be the last meeting for John Harris, Head of Regulated Services - Fostering, who would be retiring shortly after working for the Council for 35 years. Deborah Crawford, Fostering Team Manager, had been appointed to replace John as Head of Regulated Services for Fostering. In addition, it was also reported that Yvonne Shearwood would also shortly be leaving her role as Head of Regulated Services for Adoption. Yvonne had been offered an Assistant Director position at North East Lincolnshire Council. On behalf of the Panel, the Chairman thanked John and Yvonne for all their hard work and support to the Panel and wished them both all the very best for the future.

The Assistant Director – Children's Safeguarding echoed the comments of the Chairman and added that they had both been a great source of support for children in care and would be greatly missed.

It was also reported that Children's Services had had its annual conversation with Ofsted the previous week. This had been a good conversation, and details would be brought to the Panel in due course.

53 VOICES FOR CHOICES (V4C) UPDATE REPORT

Consideration was given to a report which provided the Panel with a summary and overview of activities and meetings undertaken between October 2020 and January 2021 in relation to V4C; future V4C planning and progress, including consulting with children and young people within residential settings; and soundLINCS V4C music sessions for children and young people.

(NOTE: Meeting adjourned at 10.13am due to lost connection and recommenced at 10.21am)

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:-

- Members commented that they were pleased that the V4C delivery staff were visiting residential homes to directly engage with the children and young people. It was acknowledged that times were difficult due to the pandemic restrictions, but progress was still being made and the team was thanked for its work during this time.
- It was commented that it was positive that the soundLINCS programme was continuing.
- It was noted that there had been some concerns about some of the venues where the meetings had taken place, and it was queried whether assurance would be given that more suitable venues would be used in the future. It was confirmed that substantial work had taken place to scope out potential venues for future meetings. It was also noted that some of the issues highlighted around venues related to the Big Conversation events.
- Members commended the Boston and South Holland Group for all the activities they were undertaking and sought clarification on how often it was meeting. Officers advised that traditionally, the V4C meetings took place monthly, but the Boston and

South Holland group had wanted to meet more often than that. It was also noted that this group had demonstrated that virtual meetings of V4C could be delivered successfully.

- There was disappointment that numbers attending on the east coast were still lower than hoped for, particularly considering the facilities which were available in the area.
- It was queried whether the zoom meetings would continue after restrictions were lifted. Members were advised that there were a number of young people who would like to continue to have this option, and it was possible that virtual meetings could run alongside face-to-face meetings.
- It was noted that the attendance at meetings in December 2020 and January 2021 was lower than normal, and it was queried whether attendance was traditionally lower at this time of year, and if not were there any particular reasons for this. It was noted that attendances in previous years at this time had been good, however it was a chaotic time with schools and lockdown restrictions being brought in. Officers reported that since that time attendances had improved.

RESOLVED

That the V4C meetings and activities undertaken be noted and that the Panel support the work for future planning and delivery of V4C meetings and activities.

54 CHILDREN IN CARE PERFORMANCE MEASURES - QUARTER 3 2020/21 (OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2020)

Consideration was given to a report which provided key performance information for quarter 3 2020/21 that was relevant to the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

It was reported that seven of the 14 measures which related to Children in Care were outside of the target set by the services.

In relation to the 'Fostering/adoption of LAC aged 10-<18 years old' measure, it was noted that whilst 76.8% was under target, it was still strong performance. Performance in this area was being impacted by the pandemic as fostering options were reduced. There had also been a concentrated focus on reunifying children with their birth families this year.

It was noted that the length of placement measure had improved, but it was still below target. The measures related to number of routine immunisations and up to date dental checks were also below target, but this was very much linked to the pandemic, and the NHS not being in a position to deliver the regular immunisations or regular dental treatment. It was however, noted that any child that had needed emergency dental treatment had received it. It was also reported that confirmation had been received that GP practices would be prioritising vulnerable children as services returned to normal.

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 relation to care leavers in employment, education or training, it was queried what the Council could do to encourage its contractors to take on apprentices who were care leavers and whether this could be reported to the Panel. Officers agreed that this could be added in to future reports.
- It was noted that some children had returned to their birth families, and it was confirmed that care orders could be removed to allow this. This would be risk assessed to ensure it was appropriate for the child to return, and the family network would be examined and a support package would be put in place. However, the reduced capacity in the court system had meant that fewer care orders had been removed.
- It was commented that there had been fewer moves for foster children due to the restrictions and foster carers had been able to work through issues, and it was queried whether some lessons had been learned which could help with reducing placement moves in the future. The Panel was advised that new ways of working had been found and a blended approach was now being developed. It was noted that some foster carers had really valued the Zoom meetings with their supervising social workers as they had been able to take place more regularly. Caring 2 Learn had also had a big impact as well as the support that foster carers had found with each other (e.g. WhatsApp groups/Facebook groups) and it was hoped that these were things which would continue.
- In relation to some of the other performance measures which have not reached target due to Covid-19, such as those in education, employment or training and dental check-ups, it was queried how long until that performance would settle down, as next year's performance would be compared to 2020's data. It was suggested that there was also a need for caution as performance may not immediately return to pre-Covid-19 levels. It was noted that with regards to recovery, it was difficult to know when performance would start to return to normal, but once there was access to dental appointments and immunisation appointments, every effort would be made to get the young people seen. The concern was for care leavers in employment, education and training, but there was support from elected members and the Corporate Leadership Team to put additional support into Barnardo's for the next 12 months, and work was underway to explore what the key performance indicators would be in the future.

RESOLVED

That the Corporate Parenting Panel note the performance information contained within the appendices of the report.

Consideration was given to a report which provided an overview of the Long-Term Mental Health of Children in Care in England research project to date and planned future phases.

The Assistant Director – Children's Safeguarding advised that when the authority was first approached about taking part in the project, it was during the Pandemic, and it was thought that it would be useful to understand the effect of it on young people's mental health. However, when the questionnaire was received it was discovered that it was very lengthy. The authority had a cohort of 117 young people who could complete it and only 25 completed the survey.

It was not as successful as had been hoped, and it was unlikely that there would be any learning for the authority as a result of this, although feedback was still awaited.

As a result of this, the Assistant Director had requested that the strengths and difficulties questionnaire that was used with young people was reinforced, to use that as the tool for looking at their long term emotional and mental health needs.

The Assistant Director expressed disappointment that the project had not delivered the results as hoped, and if the length of the questionnaire had been known, it was unlikely that the authority would have agreed to take part in the project.

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:

- Members commented that they shared the view of the Assistant Director – Children's Safeguarding in relation to this project. It was agreed that it was a vital area of research, and it was queried whether there were any of the questions in the survey that it was thought should be asked in the work that the authority did. Members were advised that the 'Tell Us' survey would be re-written with young people.
- It was noted that Bristol University was a well-recognised university for carrying out research.
- It was highlighted that there were 360 questions in the questionnaire for this research project.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

56 FOSTERING QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT - QUARTER 3

Consideration was given to a report which provided an overview of activity within the Fostering Service over quarter 3. It was reported that nothing significant had changed, and it was noted that the number of foster carers had increased, and placement stability had also increased. Some growth in the numbers of children placed out of county had been seen.

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It was also reported that carers were feeling more valued, and the additional funding for carers had been very well received, and there was now more of a foster carer community.

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 queried when it would be possible to get the FAB awards up and running again. Members were advised that the first Carers Awards had taken place as an online event, and it had gone better than expected, and the message which had come from the foster carers was that they felt valued.
- Members thanked John Harris for all his hard work over his years with the Council and stated that he was leaving the Fostering Service in a great place. It was also commented that the Panel had valued and appreciated his input over the years, and would look forward to working with Deborah Crawford in the future.

RESOLVED

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

57 CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME

This report set out the Panel's work programme for 2021. It was highlighted that a date was being identified for an additional meeting in June 2021 for induction of the new Panel.

RESOLVED

That the work programme as presented be noted.

It was announced that this was the last meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel for Councillor D Brailsford as he would not be standing for election in May. Members expressed their thanks to Councillor D Brailsford for all the work he had done for the Panel and his leadership as Chairman. Officers echoed these thanks, and commented that they had benefitted from his leadership and guidance, and had challenged and supported officers but had always acted with the intention of supporting and improving outcomes for children and young people.

The Chairman commented that one of the things that had impressed him most was the foster carers, and how they always faced challenges, and he continued to be amazed by the enthusiasm they had for what they did, and he congratulated them for everything they did. He also made reference to the Virtual School and Caring2Learn which had had a positive impact on the service, as well as the improvements to working with partners such as Barnardo's and the NHS which had been made over the years, and highlighted the Outstanding rating which had been received from Ofsted. He also thanked the officers for their professional reports and was grateful for the support he had received from the Democratic Services Team.

In closing, the Chairman commented that he wished that more of his Council colleagues would get involved with Children's Services, and finally that it had been a pleasure to be the Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

The meeting closed at 11.30 am