

**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL
 26 NOVEMBER 2020**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR D BRAILSFORD (CHAIRMAN)

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

Officers in attendance:-

Kieran Barnes (Virtual School Head Teacher), John Harris (Head of Regulated Services - Fostering), Carolyn Knight (Quality and Standards Manager), Ben Lilley (Team Manager, Quality and Standards), Janice Spencer OBE (Assistant Director of Children's Services Safeguarding), Nigel West (Head of Democratic Services and Statutory Scrutiny Officer), Nicola Wilkinson (South West Lincolnshire CCG) and Rachel Wilson (Democratic Services Officer)

25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs J E Killey and M A Whittington. An apology for absence was also received from Polly Coombes (Foster Carer).

26 DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest at this point in the meeting.

27 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 SEPTEMBER 2020

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2020 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

28 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR AND LEAD OFFICERS

There were no announcements by the Chairman, Executive Councillor or Lead Officers.

29 INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE - 6 MONTH REPORT (APRIL - SEPTEMBER 2020)

Consideration was given to a report which provided the Panel with an opportunity to consider the six monthly report on the Independent Chair's Service. It updated members on the work undertaken between April and September 2020.

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

- Members commented that whilst these were unprecedented times with Covid-19, but were pleased that they were still regularly receiving the IRO reports. Officers were thanked for continuing to send these through.
- It was queried what procedures were put in place for children that were on remand, and if there was any additional support put in place. Members were advised that these children were entitled to the same support as children in care. It was noted that any additional support required would be child specific.

RESOLVED

That the six monthly report be received.

30 REGULATION 44 INDEPENDENT VISITING SERVICE - SIX MONTH REPORT (APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 2020)

Consideration was given to a report which provided the Corporate Parenting Panel with an update on the work of the Independent Visitor. It was reported that there were now three Independent Visitors who were visiting the seven homes and the supported living schemes.

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 Chairman advised that he had visited the residential home at Albion Street, and reported that he was pleased to see the young people engaging well, and also reported that the manager was supportive. He also commented on the good atmosphere within the home. It was reported that Ofsted been back and the issues previously identified had been resolved. The Chairman was pleased to see that action had been taken to remedy the issues.
- It was queried whether there were any cases of Covid-19 in any of the children's homes. It was noted that there had been some cases in a couple of the homes and the secure unit, and details of how the situation had been managed was shared with the Panel.
- A member commented that they missed visiting the home at Eastgate and asked that his best wishes were passed on to everyone there.
- It was also noted that there had been some cases in the Haven and outbreaks at Strut centres, but as they were respite homes, they had been managed slightly differently. It was also reported that the children at the Beacon were now out of isolation.
- In relation to the secure unit, it was queried how the young people were managed in terms of needing to self-isolate and whether there was any priority access to testing. Members were advised that there was a separate wing in the unit for young people entering and being required to self-isolate, whilst in this wing there was a lot of one to one support for the young people. When tests had needed to be completed, the home testing kits and results had been

received quickly. However, there was no priority access to testing for looked after children.

- It was queried whether the Fire Houses in Grantham, were within the remit of the Independent Visiting Service. It was reported that they were semi-independent, and were light-touch, therefore monthly visits were not required, but they did receive visits.
- In relation to the news that Lincolnshire would be placed into tier 3 at the end of lockdown, it was queried whether this would mean that visits would be suspended again? Officers advised that guidance was awaited, but there would be a need to risk assess again. Following lessons learned from the previous lockdown, officers would like to be able to continue face to face visits. However, it was hoped this would be possible as the staff had access to the necessary PPE this time, as well as new safety procedures in place. It was noted that it was unlikely that groups would be resuming face to face activities in the near future.
- It was queried why the issues at Albion Street had not been picked up until the visit by Ofsted, and it was queried what reassurance there was that this would not happen again. It was acknowledged that there had been challenges with only being able to carry out virtual meetings, particularly around the fabric of the building, as there was only so much that could be viewed on a virtual call. The documents which were requested and sent through gave a good picture of the situation, but it was not possible to view it in its entirety. Members could be assured that a lot of learning had come out of this situation. Officers had been able to review the information and were assured that this was not a situation which had been replicated in other homes.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

31 CHILDREN IN CARE ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

Consideration was given to a report which provided an overview of services provided to Children in Care and their impact for the year 2019/20. It was noted that the report covered the period from 1 April to 31 March 2020.

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:

- It was queried whether there was a need to provide additional accommodation in the homes to meet future demand. It was reported that the number of children in care had stabilised, however, the expectation of the local authority of being able to place all children in foster care had become challenging. There was an increasing number of children moving into residential care due to more complex needs, and also sometimes because there were no fostering alternatives. It was confirmed that an increase of children coming into care and being placed in external residential provision was being seen. The Panel was advised that an Invest to save bid had been put to the Leader of the Council, which had been accepted, which gave authority to look to commission

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another two residential homes. Suitable locations were currently being explored, as well as the potential size of the home and were preparing the report which would go to the Executive Councillor for Adult Care, Health and Children's for consideration. It was also noted that work was being carried out with Impower looking at Value and Care which included work on a toolkit that identified needs and looks at where placement matching might be better supported. It had been trialled on 149 children that were looked after, and this work had identified some children that could be stepped down from residential provision to foster care. However, one of the challenges during the pandemic had been the availability of foster carers. Officers were hopeful that they could work through that.

- It was queried whether any of the existing residential homes could be expanded to manage the additional demand. However, the Panel was advised that this was not an approach the authority was following, and there was a move towards smaller and more nurturing environments in residential provision, where the child can be prepared to move back into a family environment, whether that was foster care, one of their relatives or even back to their parents. It was commented that the starting point for the authority had always been that there was a foster placement for every child. However, some had experienced such trauma in a home environment that it was not possible for them to go straight to a foster family. The hope was to have smaller bedded units where staff could work with the child to transition them back to a family environment. At Eastgate there had also been increased successes in transitioning some children back to their parents.
- The Chairman advised that he had been invited by the Executive Councillor for Adult Care, Health and Children's Services to be involved in the process for looking at the options for new residential homes.
- Concerns were raised regarding county lines and drug gangs, and it was queried whether foster carers and staff in the homes were aware of these issues. It was noted that children in care did have a network of people around them to support them, and there were close partnerships with the police. It was noted that there had been a number of young people had been placed in a secure unit. Members were assured that this was something that was taken seriously.
- In relation to the initial health assessments, it was reported that prior to the end of 2019, alternative ways of completing these assessments had been looked at, 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. As a result, more assessments had been carried out within the 20 days, and positive feedback had also been received from carers. This project was continuing and it would be reported on in the next annual report.

RESOLVED

1. That the annual report be accepted as an accurate reflection of services provided for looked after children;
2. That the recommendations for 2020-2021 set out within the annual report be supported.

32 VOICES 4 CHOICES (V4C) UPDATE REPORT

Consideration was given to a report which provided a summary and overview of V4C activities between June and October 2020; a brief summary of V4C activities in 2019 and 2020 prior to current reporting; future V4C planning and progress, with the aim being to move towards physical meetings; and the final draft of the Lincolnshire Caring Promise following the review to update the Care Pledge.

It was noted that the 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 Children in Care what did and did 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.

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:

- It was queried whether there was good engagement with children in residential homes and whether they regularly attended V4C. It was also queried whether the homes received invitations to the meetings and also if non-attendance was followed up with the home managers. Members were advised that there was engagement from some of the homes, and youth workers delivered activities in some of the homes. However, it was acknowledged that communication could be better and this was included as part of the action plan.
- Members commented that they were pleased to see that the Sound LINC'S music programme had been well received and it was highlighted that there was evidence that playing a musical instrument helped with learning across a number of subjects. It was noted that this programme had been extended and the young people had expressed a wish to continue with this.

RESOLVED

That the report and update presented be noted.

33 CHILDREN IN CARE PERFORMANCE MEASURES QUARTER 2

Consideration was given to a report which provided the Corporate Parenting Panel with key performance information for Quarter 2 2020/21 that was relevant to the work of the Panel.

It was reported that the performance had been a mixed picture and there had been an impact on performance because of Covid-19, particularly around foster care provision.

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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:

- How did Lincolnshire compare with its statistical neighbours in terms of performance and where targets had not been achieved, and were they in a similar position. Will have reported on 30 September 2020 some of the data to the DFE which will be disseminated and extrapolated. Regionally colleagues were experiencing very similar things or were in a worse position. It was noted that even though Lincolnshire's figures were not where officers would aspire to be, the County was still in a better position than some other areas in terms of numbers of Children in Care.
- It was commented that given the circumstances, and as Lincolnshire was in a slightly better position than some of its neighbours, officers should be satisfied with the level of performance achieved. The Assistant Director advised that she would pass these comments onto the staff which would be appreciated.
- With regard to the county council's role as a corporate parent, it was commented that there were opportunities for apprenticeships coming up in adult services, and it was queried whether the council was aware of its responsibilities as a corporate parent and passed details of these opportunities through to children's services. The Panel was advised that the Council had a strong apprenticeships programme for children leaving care and the whole of the council needed to be supporting care leavers to access employment. Officers would ensure that this message was reinforced.

RESOLVED

That the current performance be noted.

34 FOSTERING REPORT - QUARTER 1 (APRIL - JUNE 2020)

(NOTE: Councillor M A Whittington left the meeting at 3.44pm)

Consideration was given to a report which provided the Corporate Parenting Panel with an overview of activities within the Fostering Service over quarter 1 (April – June 2020).

Response of foster carers to covid-19 had been tremendous, whilst some foster carers had been unable to take in new placements due to existing health conditions they had continued to care for children already placed with them despite own vulnerabilities.

It was noted that an upturn in recruitment activity and interest had been seen, and there were almost 30 new foster carers ready to be approved.

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 retention and recruitment, and looking ahead over next 5 years, given the current unemployment levels, it was queried whether the authority's robust procedures would remain robust in the future if the numbers of enquiries continued to rise. It was noted that historically more people came forward as foster carers in times of higher unemployment in order to receive additional income and also to give back to their communities. It was noted that there were always opportunities for improvements to be made and some of the transformation work which had taken place during the last year would be looked at. There was also a very high online presence, and there was a need for balance between the business aspect and also the support provided.
- In relation to some of the lessons learned through Covid-19, it was queried what it was hoped could be continued. Members were advised that aspects such as the Caring2Learn model, foster carer champions, and the online presence had been successful and this approach was something that officers had tried to embed in the service.
- One of the added members commented that as part of the fostering community, they had been well supported, and it had been really heartening to see response and interest from people. She also advised that contact with other carers was now significantly better than when she started as a foster carer. Officers had tried many different ways to ensure that foster carers felt supported and to work with each other and foster carers had responded well to the Caring2 Learn network. There were numerous events held every week and foster carers were able to share their experience and training provided by the service whilst also being supported by social workers. It was also noted that there was also a Whatsapp group which had been set up, so people were able to ask for support at any time of day.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

35 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.

It was noted that the meeting scheduled for May 2021, may need to be moved due to the proximity to the election.

It was also highlighted that the fostering report due to be presented at the January meeting would be fore Quarter 2, and not quarter 1 as listed.

RESOLVED

That the work programme be noted.

36 PRIVATE FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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The Corporate Parenting Panel received a report which informed members of the state of Private Fostering in accordance with the requirements of the Children's Act 1989, the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005 and provided key service performance information over the past 12 months.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 4.04 pm