

**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL
 20 JANUARY 2022**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR S P ROE (CHAIRMAN)

Lincolnshire County Council: Councillors Clio Perraton-Williams (Vice-Chairman), K H Cooke, A G Hagues and C Matthews

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

attended the meeting as observers

Officers in attendance:-

Lisa Adams (Service Manager, Barnardos), Amy Allcock (Senior Commissioning Officer), Kieran Barnes (Virtual School Head Teacher), Kiara Chatziioannou (Scrutiny Officer), Deborah Crawford (Head of Service, Fostering, Adoption and Leaving Care), Bridie Fletcher (Commissioning Officer), Kerry Mitchell (Assistant Director Barnardo's (Lincolnshire)), Andrew Morris (Corporate Parenting Manager), Janice Spencer OBE (Assistant Director of Children's Safeguarding) and Emily Wilcox (Democratic Services Officer)

37 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

None had been received.

38 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

39 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

40 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR AND LEAD OFFICERS

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

41 COMMISSIONING EXCELLENCE: MEETING THE SUFFICIENCY DUTY 2018-2022 ANNUAL UPDATE AND TIMELINE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEW 2023-2027

STRATEGY

Consideration was given to a report by the Commissioning Manager – Commercial, which presented an annual update to the Action Plan of the Looked After Children Placement Sufficiency Strategy – 'Commissioning Excellence: Meeting the Sufficiency Duty 2018-2022' as well as an indicative development timeline for the Children in Care Commissioning Strategy 2023-2027, which were set out at Appendix A and B to the report.

The Panel were advised that the Council had been operating within their new youth housing contract, NEST, for a year which had been successful. NEST offered three sites across Lincolnshire with 72 beds in total. Officer commended the innovation and tenacity of the provider of the contract, NACRO, and highlighted their willingness to engage with social care and leaving care colleagues. The contract had provided intensive support units and successfully provided young people with complex behaviours further support prior to their transition into larger accommodation hubs.

An expansion of the digital offer to service users and young individuals within certain services had been welcomed, particularly operating virtual sessions and within children's centres, Voices4Choices and Big Conversation groups. It was important to note that the virtual offer did not detract or replace long term face to face engagement, but it could deliver positive outcomes when used appropriately.

The Lincolnshire Leaving Care Service (Barnardo's) was a highly effective service in supporting the county's care leavers and was also presenting high KPI performance.

From a commissioning perspective there was service review of both the open select list (OSL) procurement methodology and the closed ordered list (COL) procurement, pertinent to all supported accommodation for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. What was looked at in the first instance (OSL) was Independent Non-Maintained Special Schools (INMS) providers, residential providers, foster care and intense needs supported accommodation which was unregulated. Any replacement procurement practice and system was aimed to be in place by Sep-Oct 2022. In terms of COL it was added that unaccompanied asylum seekers that arrived out of hours were party of the National Transfer Scheme.

Consideration was given to the report and during the discussion the following points were noted:

- There was a balance to be made in ensuring that all 72 beds for (2 spare beds) were filled whilst also ensuring that there was some capacity to support young people who may need accommodation urgently. It was noted that the Council had a statutory obligation to accommodate any under 18-year-olds who had become homeless. Members were reassured that NACRO and NEST operated a well-managed and responsive service which provided low level supported accommodations as well provided a responsive service in terms of youth homelessness. The Council operated a spot purchase agreement via the OSL in which they could spot purchase accommodation to ensure that no child was left homeless at any time.

- The Panel were encouraged to see the County working together with District Councils and other partners to provide an excellent Care Leaver offer.
- The Panel was pleased that from April North Kesteven, West Lindsey and South Kesteven District Councils would be offering free leisure activity access to Looked After Children and care leavers.
- There had been further progress made on the Care Leaver offer over recent years, that included Council tax relief for some young people and some District Councils identified themselves as fostering friendly organisations.
- Officers were working to progress the healthcare offer within the Care Leaver Service as well as working on ways to communicate the offer to Care Leavers in a young person friendly way.
- Officers also hoped to develop more employment and training opportunities for young people.
- It was acknowledged that there was a shortage of affordable, accessible, one bedroom accommodation available nationally which could be an issue for care leavers. However, Officers continued to support care leavers to obtain suitable accommodation.
- The 65% target for care leavers accessing education, employment or training was an aspirational target and the 62% that had been achieved was a fantastic achievement for care leavers and was higher than the national average. Despite challenges, Officers continued to prioritise progressing this target to support young people into education, employment or training. The Council had obtained funding to recruit to a post which would support young people through the barriers to education, employment or training, which were often related to mental health issues.

RESOLVED:

That the updated action plan for the Sufficiency Strategy 2018 - 2022 and the indicative timetable for the development of the Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy 2023-27 be endorsed.

42 LINCOLNSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL VIRTUAL SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT ACADEMIC YEAR 2020-2021

Consideration was given to a report presented by the Head Teacher – Virtual Schools, which provided the Lincolnshire Virtual School Annual Report for the academic year 2020-21, as set out at appendix A to the report.

Despite a challenging period, the Virtual School Team had remained focussed on being ambitious for the young people and continued to ensure that adequate support through education was provided. The Head Teacher – Virtual Schools highlighted the key messages within the report, which included: -

**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL
20 JANUARY 2022**

The Lincolnshire Virtual School Team continued to be ambitious for all of Children in Care and continued to promote a holistic approach to learning. It was understood that promoting better educational outcomes was important for everyone and therefore the team provided training, challenge, advice and support to schools, children's services colleagues, foster carers, parents and others so that they could better advocate for the learning of children and young people in their care.

There remained a continued and growing emphasis on the development of "Learning Homes" where carers became increasingly skilled to support learning and schools were committed to creating an environment where the specific emotional and educational needs of children and young people were understood, and their potential fulfilled.

Pupil Premium was allocated to schools in a timely way and was linked to targets outlined in the Personal Education Plan, which had continued throughout Covid-19 and additional tuition had been commissioned to support Children in Care wherever possible.

The importance of early intervention was emphasised to promote outcomes and as a result all Children in Care or entering care aged 3-13 continued to receive support from Specialist Teachers so that schools were better informed of strategies to improve communication and language needs, if appropriate.

The Virtual School Team continued to work effectively and in cooperation with carers, parents, schools and Children's Services colleagues to support the education of Children in Care throughout the period of lockdown and recovery up to August 2021, working closely with children and young people with the specific aim of developing strong and effective working relationships and ensuring the voice of the children and young people was heard and their successes celebrated.

Consideration was given to the report and during the discussion the following points were noted:

- The Panel expressed its thanks to officers within the team for their work on virtual schools.
- There was a national issue with children having anxieties around returning to school following the pandemic. The Panel was reassured that the Virtual Schools Team were developing a strategy to address the issue.
- It was acknowledged that children had missed out on vital education and were missing out on knowledge in certain areas as a result of the pandemic. All Children in Care had had personal education plan meetings at least three times a year which would set specific targets. The Council would look to provide further tuition to those children in which learning gaps had been identified.
- The offer of additional tuition was available for Children in Care where appropriate, which could also provide support for emotional wellbeing.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Virtual School Annual Report 2020-21 and the recommendations for the academic year 2021-22 be endorsed;
2. That consideration be given to the comments made by the Panel.

43 LINCOLNSHIRE LEAVING CARE - 6 MONTHLY UPDATE REPORT

Consideration was given to a report by the Service Manager – Barnardo’s Leaving Care Service Team, which provided an update a six-monthly update report in relation to Lincolnshire’s Leaving Care Service which was managed by Barnardo’s.

The Panel was informed that throughout the pandemic, the team had continued to carry out face to face visits with young people, alongside increasing the use of virtual forums and WhatsApp messages to communicate with young people on a regular basis.

The Service Manager -Barnardo’s emphasised the good working relationships that had been established between the Council and Barnardo’s for the NEST service and Supported Lodging Schemes, which was a rental room arrangement in which young people were matched to providers supported within their placement. An assessment process was in place for new placements and providers.

The service adapted, worked hard to continue to support young people undertaking apprenticeships through covid-19 and had recently undertaken a piece of work to understand the reason why Care Leavers were not taking up employment, education or training opportunities. Of 52 young people, 15 care leavers were able to provide responses which had indicated a number of ‘wellbeing’ issues that were stopping care leavers from accessing opportunities. Therefore, the Leaving Care Service were looking to advertise for a Wellbeing Worker to sit alongside the employment and training specialists which would target the group and try and encourage engagement and attendance.

The Gap Homes initiative was progressing, and the service now had a Specialist Mental Health Worker in post which was working exceptionally well. The initiative provided consultations with young people with mental health issues and helped find pathways to specialist services for care leavers.

The report highlighted some areas of success over the period, which included: Three of Lincolnshire Care Leavers spending time with Barnardo’s Chief Executive and representative from the House of Lords following feedback they had provided to the National Care Journey Collaborative. There were also a number of local businesses who had offered vouchers, haircuts and grants for young people in Louth.

Consideration was given to the report and in response to a question raised, it was confirmed that Barnardo’s were currently moving to their fourth round of mentorships in partnership with Serco, in which around 24 people had benefited from these. Following the success of the programme in Lincolnshire, Serco had recently proposed an extension to the project on a national basis.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received and the comments from the discussion be noted.

44 FOSTERING SERVICE QUARTER THREE PERFORMANCE REPORT

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Service – Fostering, Adoption and Leaving in Care, which provided an overview of the fostering service performance for quarter three.

During this third quarter of this year, the service had continued to respond to the continuing effects of the pandemic by continuing to offer support in a variety of ways. Alongside face-to-face supervision and support, the virtual foster care community continued to grow from strength to strength providing a wraparound support service to all fostering families, which was critical in securing their wellbeing in the invaluable role they undertake in caring for children and promoting placement stability.

During quarter three the number of children in care had continued to rise to 696 (sourced by monthly reporting at the end of November 2021). At the same time those placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) decreased to 35.

Placing children and young people with family and friends remained the first consideration when they first entered care. This continued to be looked at throughout their care journey experience through Kinship. Kinship continued to work with the area locality teams in refining this process and regular discussions and joint supervisions with the children's social workers and practice supervisors were key within this process.

Staying Put continued to be an active part of the fostering service and referrals continued to be received. There were currently 29 young people waiting to join the scheme when they reached their 18th birthday. Each Staying Put arrangement was discussed at the first Children in Care review following the young person's 16th birthday. The decision regarding Staying Put was recorded within the young person's Pathway Plan and reviewed at each Children in Care review thereafter.

Fostering recruitment continued to work through the challenges presented by the pandemic and recruitment activity was returning to a more stable place that matched previous activity trends. Recruitment had developed into an area that was seen as everyone's responsibility with a wider pool of Supervising Social Workers completing half of initial visits. As restrictions had eased the service has adopted a smarter way of working using both face to face and online interactions and this will continue to be reviewed.

The Head of Service – Fostering reiterated her thanks to Foster Carers across the County for their hard work and dedication during an extremely challenging time.

Consideration was given to the report and during the discussion the following points were noted:

- Private providers of foster care were required to adhere to the same regulations and the same standards as the Council, including Ofsted inspections. Any Lincolnshire child placed with an independent fostering provider was subject to the same level of scrutiny and would have each household would have a supervising social worker.
- Concerns were raised by the Panel over the commercialisation of foster care and the use of money to produce profits rather than for providing support to children.
- A corporate audit of the recruitment and retention progress within the fostering service was soon to be undertaken which would review the recruitment and retention processes for foster carers.
- It was clarified that the Council did not have any responsibility for children from other local authorities who were placed in Lincolnshire within private fostering providers.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received, and the comments made be recorded.

45 CHILDREN IN CARE ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

Consideration was given to a report by Elizabeth Bunney, Lincolnshire Community Healthcare Services, which invited the Panel to consider the Children in Care Annual Report for 2020/21.

The report highlighted some of the key areas in relation to the healthcare service.

The Panel was advised that the number of children and young people placed into Lincolnshire from external authorities continued to rise which included those children who had been placed with family members within the County as well as independent foster carers and residential homes. Any child registering with a Lincolnshire GP was invited to an initial health assessment with the NHS.

The 16–17-year-old age group of Children in Care equated to over 20 percent of the Looked After Children population, of which the aim was to place as many children as possible within Kinship placements.

During the pandemic, nurses had initially carried out initial health assessments over the telephone, during this time the target to complete assessments within 20 days was being met. However, it had since been concluded the nurses were unable to undertake the initial health assessments and these were now being undertaken by GPs. It was noted that 95% of review health assessments were completed within the time that they were due.

**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL
20 JANUARY 2022**

Immunisation and vaccination figures had been impacted by Covid-19, but the immunisation teams were working to catch up on immunisations that had been missed in school and the NHS continued to work with foster carers to receive their immunisations.

The number of Looked After Children receiving dental treatment had also been impacted by the pandemic and it was acknowledged that access to dental care was challenging at the current time.

The recommendations for the current year were that the Council, the Clinical Commissioning Groups and an LCHS continued to work together to improve the number of health initial health assessments completed within statutory timeframe, which had involved the recruitment of two individuals who would carry out initial health assessments.

Consideration was given to the report and during the discussion the following points were noted:

- Children and Young People placed into Lincolnshire remained the responsibility of the County Council they had been placed from, and Lincolnshire County Council would have no responsibility despite them receiving healthcare within Lincolnshire.
- Care Leavers faced unique challenges and many required lots of support to access further education, training or employment. Colleagues continued to build and maintain good relationships and provide support to individuals which was evident in the stay in touch figures.
- Concerns were raised over the lack of dental provision available to young people within Lincolnshire. The Panel was reassured that the Council were working with foster carers to ensure that all foster children had the means to access dental services.

RESOLVED:

That the report be endorsed, and the comments made be noted.

46 CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report by the Scrutiny Officer, which invited the Panel to review its work programme to ensure its contents was still relevant and would add value to the work of the Council and partners.

A request was made for a report to the Panel which would provide further detail on the barriers to further education or employment for care leavers, in particular males within the 16–17-year-old bracket, and the plans that were in place to progress the issue.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be agreed, subject to the proposed amendments.

The meeting closed at 11.41 am