



**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL
10 MARCH 2022**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR S P ROE (CHAIRMAN)

Lincolnshire County Council: Councillors K H Cooke, A G Hagues, Mrs J E Killey and M A Whittington

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

Officers in attendance:

Kieran Barnes (Virtual School Head Teacher), Kiara Chatziioannou (Scrutiny Officer), Deborah Crawford (Head of Service, Fostering, Adoption and Leaving Care), Rebecca Fleming (Caring2Learn - Practice Supervisor), Rachel Freeman (Interim Head of Service, Children's (Safeguarding)), Ben Lilley (Team Manager, Quality and Standards), Andrew Morris (Corporate Parenting Manager) and Emily Wilcox (Democratic Services Officer)

Officers in attendance via Microsoft Teams:

Craig Willingham (Deputy Manager – Children and Young People)

47 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Matthews and C L Perraton-Williams.

It was also noted that Janice Spencer, Assistant Director – Children's Services had sent her apologies due to an Ofsted inspection of Children's Services.

48 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting on 20th January 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

49 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

50 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR AND LEAD OFFICERS

The Chairman reminded the Panel that a Corporate Parenting Panel Workshop would take place on the 5th April 2022 in which all member of the Panel were invited to attend. The invitation had also been extended to Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, which had been well received by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee.

The Panel was advised that an Ofsted inspection of Children's Services had commenced.

51 VOICES FOR CHOICES (V4C) UPDATE REPORT

Consideration was given to a report by the Practice Supervisor – Quality and Standards, which provided an update on activities and future planning for Voices for Choices (V4C), Lincolnshire's Children in Care Council, which provided opportunity for children to share their experiences of being a child in care in which learning could be made.

Between October 2021 and February 2022, face to face meetings had recommenced. An overview of activities by locality was provided and could be found within the report.

The sessions encouraged the children to provide feedback on their experiences, further support and provide an opportunity to discuss general issues with the children. Groups continued to successfully participate and provide feedback on a number of issues included climate change and schooling.

Attendance levels varied across all localities and Officers continued to encourage attendance across County and different ways of increasing attendance and to explore new ways of operating V4C.

The Big Conversation had taken place in February half-term was a positive event in which over 25 children and young people had attended.

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

- There were a number of reasons that children were not attending the sessions, including being involved in other leisure activities and being satisfied with their position and therefore not feeling the need to provide feedback.
- A range of different venues had been explored in order to encourage attendance, including holding the sessions at bowling alleys or soft play centres. However it was noted that this could sometimes detract from the meaning of the event.
- The rurality of Lincolnshire and the limited access to public transport as a barrier to attendance was highlighted. It was confirmed that many children travelled via taxi and transport costs were covered.

- There were currently 720 children in care within Lincolnshire.
- Social media, advertising across teams, visiting children's homes and writing directly to the children and young people were all methods which were used to promote V4C.
- The potential for Member engagement at sessions was welcomed.
- A mix of face to face and virtual sessions as well as holding sessions during half term were suggested as ideas to encourage further attendance.
- Officers were open to holding sessions in a children's homes and other familiar environments as it was suggested that some children may feel more comfortable staying within a familiar environment although this was not possible for all children who did not live within a children's home. Feedback from children had suggested that many children and young people preferred to meet outside of their homes.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be received and endorsed;
2. That the comments made by the Panel be taken under consideration;

52 CHILDREN IN CARE - QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORT

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Fostering, Adoption and Leaving Care, which provided key performance information for Quarter 3 of 2021/22 which was relevant to the work of the Parenting Panel.

There were currently 720 children in care within Lincolnshire. The number of children in care had increased, which was partly due to the placement of a number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children within Lincolnshire.

The seven measures which had not achieved the target during the quarter were highlighted and could be found within the report and a full breakdown of all of the performance measure was set out at Appendix A.

The recruitment and retention of fosterers remained challenging in a competitive market. The pandemic had also seen a change in people's desires to continue or become foster carers.

Difficulty accessing NHS dental services nationally as well as the reduction in service as a result of the pandemic meant that the target for the Percentage of Children in Care with an up-to-date dental check had not been achieved in quarter 3, although the measure had improved. Efforts continued to ensure that all children in care were registered with a dentist and dental checks were being completed.

The Head of Fostering, Adoption and Leaving Care was pleased to report that the Children in Care Living Within a Family Environment measure had been exceeded, which emphasised that, for many children in care, a family placement was deemed the most suitable means of

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offering care and maintaining children within their family networks. The Council continued to explore enabling children and young people to remain within their family or extended network if they cannot, for whatever reason, live with their parents.

Overall the service was performing well in comparison to national data.

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

- The level of trauma experienced by many unaccompanied asylum seeking children was acknowledged.
- It was confirmed that 104 of the children in care within Lincolnshire were asylum seeking children and this figure was mandated by the Home Office. Funding for those children in Lincolnshire's care would be provided by the Home Office
- Each young person would be allocated a social worker and would have access wide range of support available children, including access to language specialist and mental health services. As with all children placed in Lincolnshire's care, support provided would be bespoke to each individual's needs. The Council were working closely with the relevant teams to ensure that there was adequate support available, which could also mean placing Children in locations where communities could better meet the religious and cultural needs of the children
- Assurance was provided that the Council had adequate resource to support the children where necessary, following the recruitment of four additional staff to support with the rise in children in care within the County.
- Officers had not yet received notification of any Ukrainian Refugee Children being placed within Lincolnshire, but there was awareness that all Lincolnshire authorities were willing to support refugees.
- Targets were set and benchmarked through comparisons with national data and any trends and projections shown nationally.

RESOLVED:

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

53 FOSTERING PERMANENCE REPORT FEBRUARY 2022

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Service Fostering, Adoption and Leaving Care and the Practice Supervisor, which invited the Panel to consider the Fostering Permanence Report February 2022, which was set out at Appendix A.

The Panel was informed that every child in care was required to have a permanence plan for their long term plan for their care. Fostering Permanence sought to ensure that each child in care had a long term plan which would prepare them for leaving care and adulthood, as well as ensuring they had security, consistence and continuity and the best change to achieve and

contribute to society. The impact of instability in the lives of children and young people was emphasised.

The report set out the different types of permanence, which included a return to birth families, kinship care, special guardianship, fostering, long term fostering, long term residential placements, child arrangement orders and adoption.

A key factor in stability and permanence in foster care was the 'match' between child and carers, which often depends on the 'chemistry' between them. The matching process was applicable for all children in care and events took place regularly, with the next event scheduled for Summer 2022.

Lincolnshire remained focussed on meeting the needs of all children in care and supporting them to have long term stability and reach their full potential.

The Panel watched a short video detailing the story of Ellie and her journey through Lincolnshire's foster care service.

The Panel acknowledged that many children in care had experienced childhood trauma prior to coming into care and welcomed opportunities to encourage permanence and stability through long term foster placement and other means.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report be received and comments made be noted;
- (2) that the report be accepted as an accurate overview of the in-House Matching activity of the service in relation to efforts made to secure Permanence for Children in Care.

54 COUNCIL TAX RELIEF TO CHILDREN LEAVING CARE - LOCAL AND NATIONAL CONTEXT

Consideration was given to a report by the Corporate Parenting Manager, which invited the Panel to consider a report which outlined the achievement to secure Council tax exemption and some of the more recent collaboration with district councils and invite the Panel to consider other offers that could be made available.

It was acknowledged that prior to coming into care, many children had experienced childhood trauma and outcomes were therefore poorer based on their experiences.

The offer to Lincolnshire's looked after children and care leavers continued to grow. In partnership with District Council's, Lincolnshire had successfully achieved a Council tax exemption for children in care and care leavers, as well as being able to offer a number of other benefits:

- Every District Council now affords young people priority on housing list and all had agreed that no care leaver would be considered intentionally homeless without a multi-agency meeting first
- Every young person in Lincolnshire could access any of the 7 housing registers for accommodation. The seven Districts waived the local connection requirement for Lincolnshire care leavers
- North Kesteven, South Kesteven, West Lindsey and East Lindsey had all agreed to offer care leavers free access to leisure facilities and fitness and wellbeing service, which was managed on an individual basis through the leaving care service

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

- Working in partnership with local businesses to help them recognise the difficulties faced by care leavers due to experiences of trauma and to therefore guarantee them interviews and job roles was a further aspiration of the team.
- Officers welcomed support from Members to encourage the remaining Districts to sign up to the scheme for free leisure facilities.
- It was acknowledged that access to apprenticeship opportunities was limited due to the need for qualifications for many schemes.
- The Panel commended the partnership work that had been carried out to provide further opportunities for Lincolnshire's children in care and care leavers. It was agreed that a letter be sent to North Kesteven, South Kesteven, West Lindsey and East Lindsey district council's to send thanks for their offer of free access to leisure facilities and fitness and wellbeing services.

RESOLVED:

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

55 VIRTUAL TOUR OF SECURE UNIT

The Panel received a virtual tour of Lincolnshire's Secure Children's Home.

The Panel welcomed the tour and in response to a number of questions raised, the following points were noted:

- The Panel commended the work that was carried out by the staff at the home and creative and restorative approach that had been adopted which motivated residents in a positive way.
- Referrals were made nationally by the youth referral system and would be screened by the manager of the home. Referrals were largely from the criminal justice system and included those with additional vulnerabilities. There was also one welfare bed available which was nationally managed.
- Young people had access to mental health support through the CAMHS team.

- Staff teams were well established and each child received 1-1 support during the day time, and staffing levels were reduced during the night, depending on the needs of residents.
- Very few serious incident occurred within the home, but children could be separated if it was felt appropriate.
- It was suggested that the Panel receive a report from other children's homes within the County at a future meeting to gain insight into how the homes are ran and potentially hear some direct experiences from children within the homes.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received and that similar arrangements be arranged for other children's homes be arranged for 2022-23

56 CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report by the Scrutiny Officer, which invited the Panel to consider and comment on the content of its work programme, as set out on pages 57-59 of the agenda pack.

It was suggested that the future work programme activity be discussed at the workshop scheduled for the 6 April 2022.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and the work programme be agreed.

The meeting closed at 11.57 am