

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

12 MAY 2022

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR S P ROE (CHAIRMAN)

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

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

Officers in attendance:-

Kieran Barnes (Virtual School Head Teacher), Kiara Chatzioannou (Scrutiny Officer), Robert Close (Democratic Services Officer), Deborah Crawford (Head of Service, Fostering, Adoption and Leaving Care), Paul Fisher (Team Manager - Quality and Standards), Andrew Morris (Corporate Parenting Manager) and Janice Spencer OBE (Assistant Director of Children's Safeguarding)

57 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs J E Killey.

58 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

59 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 10 MARCH 2022

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting on 10th March 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

60 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLORS AND CHIEF OFFICERS

The Assistant Director for Children's Safeguarding advised the Panel that, following a focussed visit from Ofsted, she was pleased to report that the service received a very positive inspection and presented the headline findings to the Panel. The full report would be shared via email to the Panel.

In addition, she advised that Haven Cottage, previously graded Required Improvement in December 2022, had just been reinspected receiving a Good rating, with elements of Outstanding.

61 REGULATION 44 INDEPENDENT VISITORS REPORT

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Consideration was given to a report by the Team Manager - Quality and Standards, which invited the Panel to consider the annual report on the Regulation 44 Independent Visitors Service. Members were advised the Regulation 44 inspection identified that children and young people (CYP) were accessing education in a variety of ways. Effective and nurturing engagement from staff to CYP was observed representing a positive outcome. Ongoing development work with CYP continued to be successful through social pedagogy and restorative practice. Homes continued to participate in multi-agency partnerships, resolving issues raised by partners quickly and satisfactorily, particularly in the transfer of young people into adult care. The challenge of recruitment of permanent staff remained and solutions were being explored. However, agency staff recruited regularly under worked annual contracts which offered the CYP consistent supervision and steady relationships. Staff maintained regular and comprehensive record keeping in line with internal policies, any instances that were highlighted of record keeping inadequacies were addressed quickly. Home specific challenges remained present; however, inspectors were confident that Homes Managers continued to competently attend to challenges proficiently.

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

- All CYP in the Council's residential estates were originally from Lincolnshire, it was only independent residential provision that housed children from out of County.
- CYP who lived at the homes inherently presented no greater challenge than any other teenager, however, these challenges were assessed within their regularly reviewed independent care management plans. Regulation 44 inspectors were confident that homes worked very well with social workers and other agencies.
- All CYP were encouraged to participate in education provisions and staff collaborated closely with virtual schools and providers to promote engagement. Some homes opting to limit electronic device availability or facilitate direct engagement to CYP from education providers. A 100 per cent engagement in education rate was not expected to be achieved in the immediate future, however, staff sought to encourage engagement wherever possible.
- Noting the flexible response from staff in response to service demands, Members stressed their appreciation and admiration for their efforts.
- The Panel felt, as the impact of Covid-19 reduced, that Members should be encouraged to make arrangements to visit their local Children's Homes. Moreover, Members that were not on the Corporate Parenting Panel should receive update reports for the home that they were going to.
- CYP's voices in the homes were facilitated through a variety of methods including residents' meetings and discussions with members of staff, key workers, or independent advocates. Generally, officers sought not to overwhelm CYP with questions. Additionally, some homes implemented an anonymous feedback form to varying extents of efficacy.
- The Big Conversation highlighted a demand for previous residents of the homes to act as mentors, work was progressing with this, and officers hoped to offer an update at the next meeting of The Big Conversation.
- There were a variety of reasons why siblings were split between different homes primarily due to poor internal relations. No decision to split siblings at any point throughout their journey was taken lightly and extensive engagement and consideration took place.
- If a child or young person were to disclose anything to a member of staff that would be considered a child protection issue, staff had a duty to disclose that information through the proper channels. Sometimes, the child or young people may have chosen to confide something to their advocates which was not necessary to pass onto officers. It was stressed that young people should feel comfortable in their homes.

RESOLVED

1. That the Panel received and endorsed the Regulation 44 Independent Visitors Report and were satisfied with the activity of the independent visitors and the assurance they provided.
2. That future Regulation 44 Independent Visitors Reports contain feedback regarding engagement with education.

62 INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE YEARLY REPORT 1ST APRIL 2021 - 31ST MARCH 2022

Consideration was given to a report by the Team Manager - Quality and Standards, which invited the Panel to consider the annual report on the Independent Reviewing Service for 1st April 2021 - 31st March 2022. Members were advised that new ways of working were continually being perused to engage with CYP and parents through the use of technology facilitating hybrid and virtual meetings dependant to what best fit the stakeholders. 99.77 per cent of reviews were carried within acceptable timescales and 225 reviews were rearranged from January 2022 to March 2022. CYP were offered consultation documents prior to reviews and were regularly engaged by the service seeking to identify satisfactions and areas of improvement. There was rise of 49 children in care over a 12-month period which subsequently had an impact of the demand for reviews. Delays in court processes impacted the number of foster care changes for some children.

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

- The increase in the children in care population resulted, in part, because CYP were not exited from care during the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, the delay for court hearings resulted in CYP, who were going through the process of adoption or fostering, being unable to have their care plans legally ratified. To address this, CYP were not taken before the court unnecessarily as per the public law outline. As court capacity increased, CYP in care were expected to decrease
- Other local authorities saw similar increased in their children in care population, however Lincolnshire's still sat at 49 per 10,000 whereas statutory neighbours sat at 54 per 10,000 and all of England averaged at 63 per 10,000.
- Lincolnshire, for the first time, was seeing staffing shortages in care for children, in particular social workers being offered greater remuneration through agencies. It was observed that new generations of social workers often operated with different employment expectations to previous generations. Whilst Agency staff often expressed interest in staying with the Council permanently, however commuting demands relocating deterred them. A shortage of Social Workers was a nationally concern. the Council saw growing vacancies, they were not at the level of other local authorities. Current social workers were offered part time and flexible working arrangements where practical to encourage retention and vacant roles were backfilled through the redeployment of early help workers. All staff were supported through a wellbeing service which they were aware of and could access whenever they needed to.
- The Heath Visiting Service visited all CYP who were of concern and mitigated a great deal of the dependence of General Practitioners (GPs). Furthermore, if the Health Visiting Service felt that an appointment with a GP was necessary, they were often highly effective at securing one.
- Supported living schemes were inspected under the Regulation 44 process through a light touch exercise looking at care standards and establishing independence. It was not currently a

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regulatory requirement to undertake Regulation 44 inspections, although this was expected to change over the coming years. The current light touch process was an additional safeguarding practice undertaken to provide additional assurance to senior managers. It was clarified that six of the eight CYP in supported living schemes were in education, employment and training (EET).

- Family financial pressures were considered relevant in CYP's protected in their family networks. If that incident were to occur, the Council would intervene to ensure that the child or young person was safeguarded. Currently, there had been no increase in children in care resulting from socio-economic pressures, however officers still worked closely with families to ensure stability.
- Officers stressed that foster carers were very highly valued and children in care greatly benefited from family settings. The Council sought to recruit further suitable carers while also expanding its residential estate to house further children.
- Each child in care benefitted from an individual care plan which included contact with any and all family members, therefore, even if siblings had been split, opportunities to bring them into contact would be considered and reassessed regularly.
- The Panel endorsed the work undertaken in the Absent Fathers task and finish group adding that their residents relayed to them the issue's importance.
- It was clarified that the Lincolnshire Secure Unit housed a mixed of welfare and criminal justice young people. The six young people in the secure accommodation, as referred to in the report, represented those accommodated on welfare grounds, thus, were not exhaustive of the overall occupancy. Moreover, the secure unit was considered to deliver outstanding service by inspectors, offering a number of supportive interventions. While accommodation within the secure unit was considered to be draconian, young people were supported to promote positive life choices and behave appropriately within the community.
- Lincolnshire had a number of methods to support to recruitment of new social workers. The Council had close links with Bishop Grosseteste University and Lincoln University, which offered Social Care degrees, offering students work experience opportunities. The Central Government Scheme Step Up To Social Work resulted in a number of successful post graduate candidates now employed. The Council, a contributing member of the Apprenticeship Levy, primarily relied on internal apprentices to ensure the long-term sustainability of its care workforce. Apprenticeship opportunities were focussed on staff already in a similar role, particularly early help. Commissioned services were also being explored as a potential area from which to recruit social workers. Generic advertising to the wider public had not previously proven resource effective due to the time commitments involved.

RESOLVED

1. That the Panel received and endorsed the Independent Reviewing Service Yearly Report.
2. That future wording detailing the occupancy of the Lincolnshire Secure Unit be amended to reflect the timing of different residence and the wider capacity.

63 CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL WORKSHOP UPDATE

Consideration was given to a verbal report by the Corporate Parenting Manager and the Head of Virtual Schools, which updated the Panel to consider on the Corporate Parenting Panel Workshop. Members were advised that the workshop opened to both the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee and was attended by five Members in total.

Attendees were given the opportunity to view both local and national data, comparing Lincolnshire to statistical neighbours and national averages. Subsequently, exploring the Council's statutory duties and local service needs. The workshop then sought to identify why Lincolnshire had a generally lower rate of EET for young people in, or leaving, care compared to the equivalent cohort living with families. Discussing case studies, the workshop considered the impacts later entry to care and personal trauma. Members were advised that young people in EET increased by seven per cent over recent months. While full time employment may be the aspiration for some young people aged 16-18, absence of education or training would not satisfy the requirement for EET. Officers suggested that the conflict generated between the demand for EET, and the ambitions of young people should be reconsidered. The workshop was advised of the achievements in the leaving care service including the transitions from the virtual schools into the leaving care service. As a result of the workshop, officers were exploring the use of surplus finances to boost virtual school capacity. During the workshop consideration was given to the use of the Post 16 Pupil Premium. Additionally, officers were exploring setting up specific education and training pathways in collaboration with the Lincolnshire Learning Partnership.

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

- Members who were in attendances stressed their appreciation of the workshop, giving particular praise to the case studies which they felt demonstrated the person effects of the work of corporate parenting. They suggested if it were to be offered per annum, they would be grateful.

RESOLVED

That the Panel received and endorsed the Corporate Parenting Panel Workshop Update.

64 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 in the agenda pack.

Members expressed their interest in visiting the Council's Corporate Parenting assets in person in the 2022/23 Council Term.

RESOLVED:

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

The meeting closed at 11.44 am