

**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL
 8 SEPTEMBER 2022**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR S P ROE (CHAIRMAN)

Lincolnshire County Council: Councillors K H Cooke, A G Hagues and C Matthews

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

R D Butroid attended the meeting as observers

Officers in attendance:-

Kieran Barnes (Virtual School Head Teacher), Nicola Brangam (Children's Services Agency Advisor, Fostering and Adoption), Kiara Chatziioannou (Scrutiny Officer), Rebecca Dolman (Team Manager - Fostering North), Rachel Freeman (Interim Head of Service, Children's (Safeguarding)), Anne Johnson (Adoption Team Manager), Andrew Morris (Corporate Parenting Manager) and Rachel Wilson (Democratic Services Officer)

12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs J E Killey, C L Perraton-Williams and M A Whittington.

An apology for absence was also received from Janice Spencer, Assistant Director – Children's Safeguarding.

13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

14 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 7 JULY 2022

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 July 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

15 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLORS AND CHIEF OFFICERS

There were no announcements by the Chairman, Executive Councillors or Chief Officers.

16 CHILDREN IN CARE PERFORMANCE MEASURES QUARTER 1 2022/23 (APRIL TO JUNE 2022)

Consideration was given to a report which enabled the Panel to consider and comment on the key performance information for Quarter 1 2022/23 which was relevant to the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

A full and detailed report covering the measures relevant to Children in Care (CiC) used by Children's Services was contained in Appendix A to the report. It was noted that there were 15 measures in total that related to CiC which were reported in Quarter 1, and of these 8 did not meet their target and two were ahead of the target set by the services.

Members were guided through the explanations for the targets not being met during this quarter 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 the Council was paying for private dental treatment, and if so, was there a group account. It was confirmed that the Council had paid for private treatment where a child had been unable to access NHS treatment. It was noted that NHS treatment was still able to be accessed, but it was a challenge to do this within the time frames that enabled the Council to meet the target. It was emphasised that all children received dental help when it was needed.
- Fostering/adoption of children in care agenda 10 – 16 years old was slightly below target, and it was queried whether it was easier for younger children to be fostered. It was noted that this measure mainly related to foster placements, and those that were in residential care needed to be in that setting.
- In relation to 16 – 17 year olds not engaging in learning, it was noted that performance was at 81%, and that young people were struggling to access learning, it was queried whether the responsibility for accessing learning was the council's responsibility or the young person's. Officers highlighted that it would be more accurate to say that these young people were struggling to access education on a full-time basis, as many have not had consistent education before they came into care. Whilst there was fantastic wraparound care provided, sometimes this was not enough
- In relation to Care leavers not in education, employment or training, it was queried what the Council could do differently, and officers advised that care leavers would continue to be supported and opportunities provided. It was noted that it was important to remember that there were also other achievements that the young people would make which would be celebrated.
- It was important to note that the impacts of their life experiences did not always affect young people in the same way. Some would come into care with a history of non-attendance at school.
- It was queried whether there were any geographical areas of the county where it was particularly difficult for young people to access education, employment

or training, for example was availability of transport an issue? Officers advised that they tried to find things which would engage the young person, such as work experience, and it was noted that additional resources would be provided where possible for those young people over 16 years of age. Officers commented that would like see care leavers that did not achieve GCSE's to be able to access apprenticeships.

- It was commented that often children and young people in care could not learn to their full potential until they felt safe in their learning environment.
- It was highlighted that there were some remarkable children in care, and that it they were survivors, and due to the trauma some had experienced, just living was a daily challenge for them, and that over 50% were attending school was outstanding. It was highlighted that children in care became ready for education at a later point in life, which was why leaving care support was extended until the age of 25.
- It was noted that there was no feedback in relation to young people in custody, and members were advised that the Youth Offending Board would be presenting a report to the Panel in the future. However, it was also noted that often these were children who were not known to the local authority.
- Clarification was sought regarding the measure for the "*Average time between the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child and the Local Authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family*", and it was noted that this time was from the time the child came into care to the date they were adopted.
- It was noted that it had not been possible to move some children due to Covid-19, and then once moves were possible again, there needed to be an assessment to determine if it was safe to move the child as there were foster carers who were shielding. It was noted that this would still have an effect on the following years figures as well.

(NOTE: Councillor K Cooke joined the meeting at 10.40am)

RESOLVED

That the performance information presented be noted.

17 ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

Consideration was given to a report which informed the Corporate Parenting Panel about the work of the Adoption Service in Accordance with the requirements of the Care Standards National Minimum Standards 2003, 2011, 2014 and the Adoption and Children's Act 2002. The National Minimum Standards, together with the Adoption Regulations, formed the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Agencies. The Annual Report set out the relevant performance information and identified the key developments with the service of the last twelve months.

Members of the Panel were guided through the report, and the following was highlighted:

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- There had been 322 applications to the Adoption Support Fund for therapeutic input.
- 31 adoption orders had been granted in 2021-22, this was two more than the previous year.
- 69 Special Guardianship Orders had been granted.
- All the children adopted last year were under six years old.
- Six sibling groups had also been adopted last year. It was noted there were a lot of sibling groups coming up for this year as well.
- 27 adoptive families were approved in 2021-22, this was two more than the previous year, and there were more adopters waiting.

The Corporate Parenting Panel was provided with the opportunity to ask questions to the officers present in relation to the information contained in the report and some of the points raised during discussion included the following:

- In terms of Family Adoption Links, it was queried how the success of the partnership was quantified, and where was this scrutinised. The Panel was advised that its work was overseen by a Board, and the Council's representative was Janice Spencer. In terms of success, there was a Marketing Officer, and a website. The authority was able to see who had been the better placement providers.
- It was noted that it was a very positive Partnership, and there had been a requirement from government to set one up, there had not been a choice. The Partnership was about pooling resources, experience and skills to ensure that children were placed as effectively as possible.

RESOLVED

That the Corporate Parenting Panel note the contents of the Adoption Annual Report for 2021-22.

18 FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT 2021 - 2022

Consideration was given to the Fostering Annual Report 2021 – 2022 as part of the monitoring of the Fostering Service required under the Fostering Service Regulations 2011 and the Fostering Minimum Standards 2011.

Members of the Panel were guided through the report, and the following was highlighted:

- There were 735 children in care which was a concern. Officers were very proud that 499 had been placed in foster care as it was still a difficult period of time for fostering.
- Officers thanked all the foster carers that had continued to support the authority.
- The online community of foster carers remained very positive.
- At the end of March 2022, there were 289 foster carer households registered.
- In comparison with other local authorities, Lincolnshire was performing well.

The Corporate Parenting Panel was 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 included the following:

- In terms of recruitment, officers advised that there was a new Practice Supervisor, who had examined the marketing strategy to identify where the most interest from, and so had been able to identify which areas to target. The authority had invested heavily in the local community and visited local businesses etc. At the start there were 5,000 hits per month on social media, this had now increased to 27,000 hits per month.
- Fostering was a competitive market, and there had been a need to improve recruitment. A portal had been developed so people could track where they were in the process, as well as being allocated to a foster carer advocate at stage one of their approval, so they had a contact for any questions/advice during the process.
- There were currently 291 approved households, with 30 pending approval.
- In terms of challenges from the cost of living crisis, the Initial Expressions of Interest (IEI) were being monitored, and an increase in approvals was expected.
- It was confirmed that a fosterer could only be approved with one agency at any one time.

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions to the foster carers present, and the following was noted:

- It was queried how foster children were integrated into the family, and one foster carer responded that they had not started to foster until their own children were in their teenage years. They also advised that most of the children they had fostered had been teenagers, and did acknowledge that it had been a challenge at times. However, it was important to ensure that both children were included and had time where the focus was on them.
- It was noted that foster carers would be providing support on issues that they had not experienced themselves, and it was queried how a foster carer would start those conversations where there wasn't a shared experience. Members were advised that it was about being able to listen, encouraging honesty and openness, and a willingness to hear what the young person wanted to say, and being able to provide support without judgement.

RESOLVED

That the Fostering Annual Report be approved.

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Consideration was given to a report which provided an overview of activity within the fostering service over Quarter 1.

The Corporate Panel was guided through the report and attention was drawn to a number of particular areas.

Officers advised that an audit of foster carers who had not stayed with the service long had been undertaken and one of the main reasons given for not continuing with fostering was the impact on their birth children. It was noted that training for birth children had been introduced, as it was about preparing fostering households, rather than just foster parents.

Other areas highlighted to the Panel included:

- The family finding campaign.
- There was a belief that every child was able to be in foster placement
- The importance of identifying children's needs and the foster carers skills and knowledge.
- The importance of being proactive in terms of placement support. It was noted that the service had invested in placement support workers.
- Recruitment activity was progressing well.

RESOLVED

That the Quarterly Performance Report for Fostering (Q1) be noted as an accurate review of the Fostering Service.

20 CORPORATE PARENTING, CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVER STRATEGY
PRIORITIES ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The Corporate Parenting Panel received a verbal update from the Corporate Parenting Manager which updated members on the Children in Care and Care Leaver Strategy Priorities Action Plan. It was commented that all members of the Panel had had an opportunity to feed into the Strategy. It would be considered by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and Corporate Leadership Team to get organisational buy-in.

It was highlighted that the Strategy had been well received by members and officers, and it would be presented to the Executive on 1 November 2022 for approval.

The Panel was advised that the Strategy would be launched in November with an event, and all members would be invited, as the aim was for a whole council approach.

RESOLVED

That the update be noted.

21 CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report which enabled the Panel to consider and comment on the content of its work programme for the coming year to ensure that scrutiny was focused where it could be of greatest benefit.

It was suggested that the following items be scheduled for inclusion at future meetings:

- A report outlining the work of the Youth Offending Board
- Performance measures
- Regional Adoption Area

RESOLVED

- That the work programme as presented be approved
- That the items listed above be scheduled for inclusion at future meetings.

The meeting closed at 12.13 pm