

**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL
 9 SEPTEMBER 2021**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR S P ROE (CHAIRMAN)

Lincolnshire County Council: Councillors Clio Perraton-Williams (Vice-Chairman), Mrs J E Killey, C Matthews and M A Whittington

Officers in attendance:-

Nicola Brangam (Children's Services Agency Advisor, Fostering and Adoption), Rebecca Dolman (Team Manager - Fostering North), Simon Evans (Health Scrutiny Officer), Anne Johnson (Adoption Team Manager), Sarah Lane (Virtual School Team Manager), Janice Spencer OBE (Assistant Director - Children's Safeguarding) and Emily Wilcox (Democratic Services Officer)

Officers in attendance via Microsoft Teams:-

Andrew Morris (Corporate Parenting Manager) and Rachel Freeman (Interim Head of Service – Children's (Safeguarding))

16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apoloiges for absence were received from Councillor A G Hagues, Elizabeth Bunney (Lincs Community Health Services) and Polly Coombes (Foster Carer).

17 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

18 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 22 JULY 2021

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

19 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR AND LEAD OFFICERS

The Executive Support Councillor for Resources, Communications and Commissioning was pleased to report that the Councillor Development Group had arranged for a training session on corporate parenting to be delivered to all Members. It was hoped that corporate

parenting training would be included as part of the induction process for all Members in future.

20 QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR CHILDREN IN CARE

Consideration was given to a report by the Assistant Director – Children's Services which detailed the Quarter 1 Performance for Children in Care.

Members were advised that out of 15 measures that related to Children in Care in Quarter 1, 10 had met or exceeded the target, and 5 had not met the target.

The Assistant Director – Children's Services highlighted the key areas in the report. A full breakdown of performance was set out in appendix A to the report.

Members considered the report and during the discussion the following points were noted:

- Concerns were raised over the low numbers of care leavers in education, employment or training. Members were reminded that care leavers had further challenges due to their often traumatic background and past experiences. The council had focussed on benchmarking and achievement on an individual basis due to different backgrounds and nature of needs, adopting a holistic approach, rather than employment being the absolute goal for all care leavers. The Panel requested further information on the recruitment of two temporary specialist Leaving Care officers.
- The Panel welcomed regular feedback on the initiatives and work carried out to support care leavers into employment.
- The Panel were pleased to see how well services had recovered from Covid-19 given the difficulties faced.
- Colleagues across the council worked hard to communicate the benefits of vaccination to children, however if they were phrase competent, the council had no control over whether a child chose to be vaccinated.
- The Panel were reassured that historically, resistance to vaccinations had not been common, but appreciated that the vaccination against Covid-19 may bring new challenges.
- The council sometimes had shared parental responsibilities with carers which could be overridden in rare situations, however where a dispute could not be resolved, it was ultimately a matter to be resolved in court.
- It would take around 18 months for the vaccination programme to be back on schedule.
- In response to a question, it was agreed that the Assistant Director – Children's Services provide further explanation for the reason that variances were set within targets, as opposed to one set target.
- The Panel were pleased to see improvements in the stability of placements for children in care.

RESOLVED:

1. That the performance data be noted;
2. That the Panel receive regular reports on the work being undertaken to improve the number of care leavers in education employment or training.

21 ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Consideration was given to a report by the Adoption Team Manager 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 Act 2002.

The Panel were referred to the annual report and statement of purpose set out at appendices A and B to the report, which set out the relevant performance information and identified the key developments with the service of the last twelve months.

The Panel were informed that national guidance issued as a result of Covid-19 had caused difficulty moving children safely for around 6-8 weeks of the year, which had impacted on yearly data.

Despite challenges faced as a result of the pandemic, officers were proud to have supported 29 adoption orders and made positive changes such as the use of virtual introductions. The service had seen a significant increase in adoption enquiries but were still facing challenges with the adoption of difficult to place children.

The adoption support service had also seen a significant increase in referrals from adopters and special guardianship carers and £620,000 had been obtained from the Adoption Support Fund provided by the government for adoptive families to access therapeutic services, however the pandemic had resulted in longer than normal waiting times.

Members discussed the report and during the discussion the following points were noted:

- The Panel were pleased to see the positive progress made with adoption despite the challenges faced over the past year.
- An additional judge had been appointed at Lincoln Crown Court to support with the backlog of work in children's services, however, adoption cases did not take priority.
- A review had commenced with a view to developing services which provided support needs for special guardianship families.
- There were national campaigns which focussed on the adoption of older children and sibling groups. The service worked hard to find suitable families for children who were difficult to place, however it was important to ensure that placements were not forced as this often resulted in further issues for adoptive families.
- The service had benefited from long term stability within their staffing team. Officers were confident had been sufficient plans put in place to ensure that upcoming retirements did not disrupt the level of service provided.

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- Officers looked to utilise the adoption support fund to recruit a new early help worker.
- It was the first need of a child to be placed within a family, however where possible, the adoption team sought to consider family arrangements and place a child within a family which had a similar background or ethnicity, which sometimes involved working with other authorities to place a child.
- Work had been undertaken to expand the range of ethnic diversity of the adoptees in the future.
- The Panel sought assurance that minority ethnic groups were considered and supported as part of the adoption process.
- The Adoption Support grant provided by the government was solely to provide therapeutic services to adoptive families. The service also held a provision within their own budget called adoption support, which could provide other services that were not eligible for the grant for example, sensory services.
- The pandemic had presented challenges for many adoptive families due to the isolation and disruption to everyday life, alongside managing other long standing needs. However, some families had thrived and built solid relationships as a result.
- Where appropriate, the service continued virtual communications. However, there were some instances where face to face meetings were important.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted;
2. That the impact of Covid-19 on adoptive families be highlighted;
3. That assurance be provided to the Panel at a later date that ethnic minority groups were duly considered and supported as part of the adoption process.

22 FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Consideration was given to a report by the Fostering Team Manager, which invited the Panel to consider the annual report and statement of purpose for the fostering service.

The Fostering Team Manager acknowledged that it had been a difficult year for fostering households and thanked all Lincolnshire's foster carers for their continued support to foster placements throughout the pandemic and commended their ability to adapt.

There had been an increase in the children in care populations however the number of children contained within family networks had been of a high level.

The fostering service had faced many challenges as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, but had adapted to meet the needs of the service. The service continued to offer some training online, which had proven to be successful.

Members were referred to Appendices A and B where they could view the annual report and statement of purpose.

Members discussed the report and during the discussion the following points were noted:

- The council were working with the Home Office and District Councils to support the Afghan refugee families currently based in Lincolnshire. The offer of accommodation to the refugees was a national offer meaning that not all families would remain in Lincolnshire. The Panel welcomed the support offered to the refugees.
- Where possible, unaccompanied migrant children would look to be placed with a family that met their needs. The council continued to be responsible for any children placed out of county.
- The council had a provision to provide supported accommodation to children seeking asylum as well as a scheme which sought to find foster placements for migrant children.
- Permanent foster care was a way of providing task centred care and was usually a short term solution. In the case that a task centred care plan changed to a permanent plan, there was usually already an established relationship in place with the foster carer. Some carers had a preference to take on task centred carers.
- Home assessments had still taken place physically during the period of Covid-19 restrictions, subject to risk assessments. It was important to maintain these visits in person.
- Members were reassured that the police were taking proactive stance to the alarming comments being made towards the refugees settling in Lincolnshire.
- It was questioned whether it would be appropriate for Councillors to visit refugees to welcome them to the county and send a positive message to members of the public. The Assistant Director – Children's Services would liaise with the Home Office to see if this was possible.
- The Chairman thanked officers for allowing him to attend as a guest at a recent fostering adoption panel. Members welcomed the invitation to observe a future adoption panel meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the report be accepted as an accurate overview of the Fostering Service for 2020/2021.

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Consideration was given to a report by the Fostering Team Manager, which overview of the marketing strategy in the recruitment of Foster carers and Adopters.

The Fostering Team Manager explained that there had been a number of challenges with marketing and recruitment as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, but the team were proud to have adapted the service to manage the difficulties faced and to have adopted a flexible approach to recruitment and marketing throughout the challenging period. The team were proud of the work carried out by carers during a highly difficult time.

The Panel were informed that 10% of Lincolnshire foster carers were retiring. However, the service had seen a large increase in initial enquiries and also had the unique selling point of the Caring2Learn system.

The team had increased their virtual preparations, meeting and marketing had increased, including the launch of a Facebook campaign and an Instagram account. Officers had also worked with the council's communications team to move forms to a digital format to reduce the delay, which had seen a positive response.

The full strategy could be found at appendix A to the report.

Members considered the report and during the discussion the following points were noted:

- The Panel were pleased to see such a positive report and sympathised with the difficulties faced during the period.
- The result of a recent recruitment audit to identify the conversion rate from applications to the recruitment of carers had identified strengths of the service as well as areas of improvement. The Panel were pleased to see the move to a digital platform which had resulted in shorter response times.
- It was suggested that officers make use of Councillors' social media pages as a marketing tool to promote fostering and adoption.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be accepted as an accurate overview of the Fostering and Adoption Service;
2. That an update be provided on the use of councillors' resources as a marketing tool to promote fostering and adoption.

24 FOSTERING QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT Q1

Consideration was given to a report by the Fostering Team Manager, invited the Panel to consider the Fostering Quarterly Performance report for quarter 1 of 2021/22.

The Fostering Team Manager highlighted some key areas of performance for Quarter 1, which included the success of transformation work to bring Caring2Learn on board with the

fostering service and the positive use of virtual training during the Covid-19 pandemic which had resulted in a significant increase in carers accessing training and a rise in the number of applications. Overall, it had been a positive start for the service following a challenging year.

The Fostering Team Manager was also pleased to announce that all foster carers within Lincolnshire had received an increase of 2% in their allowance to recognise the level of care and dedication from carers.

Members discussed the report and during the discussion the following points were noted:

- The Panel were pleased to see that foster carers would be celebrated at the event scheduled for 19 October 2021. The Fostering Team Leader extended the invitation to Councillors, which was welcomed.
- The decrease in the number of people on the 'staying put' scheme was the result of young people opting into an alternative route rather than being opposed to their initial route. The scheme provided more options for young people including another scheme providing supported lodgings.

RESOLVED:

That the report be accepted as an accurate overview of the Fostering Service.

25 CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report by the Health Scrutiny Officer, which invited the Panel to consider their work programme for the coming year, which was set out on pages 170-171 of the agenda pack.

The Health Scrutiny Officer had noted requests to provide further information on the reason for the tolerances set in the Children in Care Quarter One Performance report.

It had been agreed that a further update on care leavers in education, training or employment would be included as part of the next performance update scheduled for the meeting of the Panel on the 11 November 2021.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

The meeting closed at 11.57 am