



**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL
11 NOVEMBER 2021**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR S P ROE (CHAIRMAN)

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

Added Members: Polly Coombes (Foster Carer), 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), Rachel Freeman (Interim Head of Service, Children's (Safeguarding)), Carolyn Knight (Head of Service – Quality and Standards and Principle Social Worker)
Ben Lilley (Team Manager, Quality and Standards), Janice Spencer OBE (Assistant Director of Children's Safeguarding) and Emily Wilcox (Democratic Services Officer)

26 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

27 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

An apology for absence was received from Councillor K Cooke.

28 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 9 SEPTEMBER 2021

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

29 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR AND LEAD OFFICERS

The Chairman announced that he had attended the recent Corporate Parenting training session which had been offered to all Councillors, which had been successful. The Chairman had also attended the Fostering Awards and the Big Conversation 2021, in which he had been given the opportunity to meet with Foster Parents and young adults who had been in the care system. The Chairman had invited the 'Young Inspectors' to a future meeting of the

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Panel or the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to provide the young adults with an opportunity to further engage with the Council.

The Chairman also informed Members that Visiting Members' training was scheduled for 26 November 2021 and 2 December 2021.

The Panel welcomed the proposal from the Assistant Director – Children's (Safeguarding) for Officers to liaise with the Children in Care Council on the most effective way for the Panel to engage with the Children in Care Council (Voices for Choices).

The Assistant Director – Children's (Safeguarding) was pleased to announce that the Beacon Children's home had maintained its 'good' judgement following a recent Ofsted inspection.

Members also welcomed the news that the Department for Education (DfE) had accepted the 2018 Council's proposal to expand its secure unit in Sleaford to a 24 bedroom unit which was an exciting investment opportunity and provided an opportunity to increase the number of welfare beds for young people across the County. Permission had been granted to progress to the initial stages of procurement and planning.

30 INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE SIX-MONTH REPORT - 1ST APRIL TO 30TH
SEPTEMBER 2021

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Service - Quality and Standards and Principal Social Worker, which provided a six-month update on the Independent Reviewing Service.

The service are working on a number of priorities for 2021/22, which include:

- Adapting to the 'lessons learned' as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, including offering people the choice to hold meetings virtually where appropriate. It was noted that there had been positive feedback by some parents and young people that had taken part in virtual meetings, therefore work had been carried out to ensure that the offer could remain for those who wished to partake virtually.
- Improvements in the way that the service gather and analyse feedback and information received in order to better the individual service provided to young people and families.
- The introduction of a pre-birth protocol which would reduce the need for some parents to be subject to care proceedings once their child was born. It was acknowledged that this would reduce the expectations on the parents at a time when many other checks and procedures were being undertaken.
- The development of a sexual abuse pathway as a result of the low numbers of children on a sexual abuse plan. The pathway would look to use pre-existing work in a more coherent and strategic way and identify gaps in provision which needed to be addressed.

- Investigating ways to further engage partners in child protection conferences and child in care reviews as a result of recent research which had suggested that many cases of severe abuse had been at the hands of fathers.
- The Panel was advised that the independent reviewing service had been subject to a restructure which had resulted in the introduction of a separate team manager which would mean management capacity across the independent service.

Overall, performance had remained consistently high across the service, despite challenges faced with Covid-19 and IT.

The Panel considered the report and during the discussion the following points were noted:

- The Panel were pleased to see that there was still an opportunity for people to attend meetings and training if they wished to and if it was appropriate.
- The Panel welcomed the work that was being undertaken to engage fathers with processes. It was suggested that men could often be excluded by current processes. Officers acknowledged the need for a culture shift and more work needed to be done to engage fathers which could hopefully lead to less instances of abuse.
- It was confirmed that in instances where it was difficult to engage both parents in the process, extended family would be consulted. The Council had a legal duty to explore and place the child within the family. Evidence showed that children do better when they are brought up within their family, including extended family and all family options would be exhausted before a child was placed into long term care or adoption.

RESOLVED:

1. That consideration be given to the report and the comments made be noted; That the priorities for 2020-21, as set out in the report, be endorsed.

31 REGULATION 44 INDEPENDENT VISITING SERVICE REPORT 1ST APRIL- 30TH SEPTEMBER 2021

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Service - Quality and Standards and Principal Social Worker, which introduced the six-monthly report on the inspection of the Local Authority Children's Homes by the Independent Visitors, which was a statutory requirement and served to update the Panel on how the Care Standards are met within these homes in Lincolnshire.

The Panel was advised that it was a statutory requirement to have Independent Visitors whose responsibility it was to visit all of the Council's owned and managed residential homes every month and produce a report against the quality standards which were detailed within the report. It was noted that visits had been in person over the previous quarter, whilst maintaining ensuring precautions were taken against Covid-19.

There had been an increase in the use of technology with young people in the children's homes to ensure they maintained contact with their families and other professionals. Independent advocates were now attending for physical visits to address any issues and

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concerns that may be held by young people within the homes. The Head of Service - Quality and Standards and Principal Social Worker was pleased to report that there had been no escalations during the period.

As detailed in the report, the quality of care across all of the Council's maintained children's homes was rated 'good' and in some cases 'excellent' or 'outstanding'. Members of the Panel were reassured that despite the challenges faced at the Albion Street Children's home, there was a plan in place which was proving to be successful.

Recruitment to the homes continued to be difficult, however, assurance was provided that current vacancies were covered by existing members of staff or consistent agency staff to minimise the impact on the young people within the homes.

The Panel considered the report and during the discussion the following points were noted:

- The Panel were satisfied with the quality of care being offered within children's homes, in particular that which had been rated outstanding.
- The Panel were assured that where possible, there were a number of relief staff members who were well trained to support the children and were being deployed to ease staffing issues. Many of the issues with staffing were due to the natural progression of staff and officers were not overly concerned by the levels at this moment in time.
- Albion Street had faced challenges over the previous years, which were predominantly around staffing and difficulties in the recruitment of a Homes Manager which had created instability within the staffing structure. There had also been children of varying ages with complex needs living together which was creating further issues within the home. The introduction of an experienced Homes Manager and Apprentice Homes Manager had brought stability to the staffing group. Alongside this, some older children, who had previously lived at the home, had been placed in a different setting. It was important that children were placed in the most suitable environment for their needs to be supported and that the young people could flourish and thrive within the home. The unit had recently been described as warm, inviting, and unrecognisable and officers were confident that a 'good' outcome would be achieved at the next inspection.
- Assurance was provided that there had been no children displaced as a result in the changes made to the residency at Albion House. Officers had identified the individual needs of the children and placed them in places which could meet their needs in other residential provisions which had also provided the opportunity to bring some younger children back into care within Lincolnshire.
- It was confirmed that private children's homes were subject to the same regulations as the Council's children's homes, including the Regulation 44 visits and Ofsted reporting. The Council worked with the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership to maintain processes, whereby they receive notification of any application for a children's home to ensure they were located appropriately and also provided an opportunity to raise any concerns that directly involved children and any child placed in a home in Lincolnshire would also have a social worker and could be

attending local schools and localities, which meant that they would have a care plan implemented by the Council. The Panel were assured that the Council would be notified of any concerns raised.

- It was agreed that details of any inspection reports be circulated to the local Councillor for each children's home.

RESOLVED:

That consideration be given to the report and the comments made be noted.

32 VOICES FOR CHOICES (V4C) - UPDATE REPORT

Members of the Committee held a one-minute silence to commemorate Remembrance Day.

Consideration was given to a report by the Practice Supervisor (Quality and Standards), which provided key performance information for Quarter 2 2021/22 that is relevant to the work of the Panel.

The Panel was advised that Voices for Choices (V4C) was the name of the Lincolnshire Children in Care Council which was made up of children across the County who share their views and experiences about their time in care to help develop work and provide feedback about service improvement.

During Quarter 2, the V4C groups had focussed a on a return to face-to-face meetings with the lifting of the Covid-19 restrictions.

The Panel was referred to page 56-59 of the agenda pack, which provided a breakdown of the activities undertaken and topic discussed in each locality.

The Practice Supervisor (Quality and Standards) was pleased to report that in East Lindsey now had a small group established following difficulties obtaining attendees for face-to-face meetings.

A summary of the work conducted with the BBC was provided, including details of the soundLINCS programme, and a monthly virtual V4C quiz.

The Council continued to raise awareness of V4C in the hope that they could increase attendance. Positive feedback had been received regarding the re-introduction of face-to-face meetings.

The Committee was informed that the Council held their first Big Conversation event since March 2020, in which the four V4C groups came together. The event was well tended and had produced some including the development of a buddy system where some children who were currently of V4C who will act as buddies or mentors for children coming into care.

The Panel welcomed the discussion of politics and current affairs issues within the groups.

The Assistant Director – Children’s Services reassured the Panel that Officers carefully considered and where possible addressed any issues which had been raised by the Young People at the Big Conversation.

RESOLVED:

That consideration be given to the report and the comments made be noted.

33 QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR CHILDREN IN CARE

Consideration was given to a report by the Performance Support Officer, which provided key performance information for Quarter 2 2021/22 that is relevant to the work of the Panel.

The report set out the 16 key performance indicators, of which 8 were outside the measures set by the service area, in which further detail was provided and detailed within the report and at Appendix 1 to the report:

- Fostering/adoption of Children in Care aged 10 to 16
- Stability of placements of Children in Care: Number of moves
- Percentage of Children in Care with an up-to-date dental check
- 16–17-year-old Children in Care who are participating in Learning
- Percentage of Children in Care with an up-to-date routine immunisations
- Care Leavers in Suitable Accommodation
- Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training
- Children in Care Living Within a Family Environment

The Panel considered the report and during the discussion the following points were noted:

- Members of the Panel raised concerns regarding the accessibility to Dentists in Lincolnshire. It was suggested that should a young person within the care of the Council was not able to access dental care, the Council sought treatment from a private practice. The Assistant Director – Children’s Services agreed to investigate that as a possibility.
- A Foster Council Representative detailed personal struggles that she had personally faced with getting dentistry checks for foster children.
- It was difficult to obtain information from Universities and other Higher Education authorities on information on Lincolnshire’s Care Leavers, which was mainly due to GDPR as well as is being resource intensive.
- As Corporate Parents of children who are were receiving dental treatment, it was proposed that the Chairman write to the Elective Official responsible for dentistry within Lincolnshire on behalf of the Panel to express their concerns at the lack of dentistry provision available.
- Concerns were raised over the number of Care Leavers not in employment, education or training. It was requested that a report providing further information on

this issue be reported to a future meeting of the Committee. The Panel were assured that the Council had access to information on the whereabouts of the 16 and 17 year old care leavers and had regular contact with them. Data also reflected a particular point in the year in which data was difficult to collect for a number of reasons. Assurance was provided that young people continued to be supported to find employment and the Council sought to find appropriate educational placements for those throughout their career up to the age of 18, within the virtual school.

RESOLVED:

1. That consideration be given to the report and the comments made be noted;
2. That a letter on behalf of the Chairman to the Elected Representative Responsible for Dentistry expressing the Panel's concerns with the lack of dentistry provision in Lincolnshire be drafted.

34 FOSTERING QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 2

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Fostering and Adoption, which informed the Panel about the work of the broader Children's and Fostering Service in relation to Private Fostering for the period from July to September 2021.

The Head of Fostering and Adoption paid tribute to all those who attended the Foster Carers Annual Conference and those who had received well deserved awards as well as the general acknowledgement of the appreciation the Council had for foster carer households.

This second quarter of the year had continued to be compounded by the aftermath and the ongoing effects of Covid-19. The rollout of the successful Covid-19 booster vaccination had provided increased confidence to fostering households.

The Head of Fostering and Adoption commended the work of the County's Foster Parents throughout the pandemic.

There had been a small increase in the number of children what were placed within the independent sector, who had been accommodated with local carers supporting local children and placement stability figures had remained good with 73% of children remaining in their placements for at least two and half years. The level of support provided and commitment to the service continued to be effective, as had efforts to continue to keep children with their families.

Campaigns to add to our cohort of foster care households remained clear, with that the Council were looking for fostering families to care for and sibling groups too offer permanence, but also to offer and opportunities for parents and children to be assessed together within a foster care placement. The Head of Fostering and Adoption emphasised the importance of placing children in a placement that was suitable.

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Online presence for the recruitment of foster carers had continued and the team remained proactive and visible to people that are interested in wanting to foster children.

There had been three foster carer approvals within the quarter, along with a number of assessments that were ongoing.

The Head of Fostering and Adoption paid tribute to all staff involved in the foster care process as well as the foster carers for ensuring Lincolnshire's children were well cared for.

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

- It was proposed that the Panel write to all of Lincolnshire's Foster Carers thanking them for their hard work, particularly during Covid-19.
- Although the government target for processing new applications for foster care was within 8 months, the Panel were assured that in most instances applications were processed in less than eight months. Officers recognised the wish to process applications as quickly as possible, however, it was also important to note the depth of information analysis which was carried out as part of the application process to ensure children were received the best level of care possible.
- Officers kept a record of the source to which initial enquiries were made. From gathering such information it was clear that an online presence was critical in the recruitment of foster carers.

RESOLVED:

That the consideration be given to the report and that the comments made be noted.

35 PRIVATE FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Consideration be given to a report by the Head of Fostering and Adoption, which informed the Corporate Parenting Panel about the work of the broader Children's and Fostering Service in relation to Private Fostering.

The Panel was advised that as a result of the tragic circumstances surrounding the case of Victoria Climbié, legislation was introduced around private fostering, which sits under section four of the Children Act, 2004.

The Panel was referred the statement of purpose, which underpinned the Council's responsibilities as an organisation and with oversight of privately fostered arrangements. It was important that the Council remained vigilant to those children who become subject to private fostering arrangements in order to ensure that the child is legally right and suitable and most importantly that the carers identified as private foster carers were duly assessed not only by a child social worker but also by a fostering social worker.

The private fostering agreement was the authorised by a fostering team manager which would conclude that legally and morally, it was in the child's best interest to be placed with the private fosterer. The Head of Fostering and Adoption emphasised the difference in the definition of a private foster carer and those that were assessed by Lincolnshire County Council to care for other people's children.

As part of the Council's safeguarding partnership, the role of a private foster was publicised to raise awareness of what a private fostering arrangement was and ensure that as many people as possible reported such arrangements to the Council. This included discussions with colleagues in schools and health establishments to ensure that those in paternal roles were also aware of the legal requirements.

The Panel was invited to ask questions on the annual report, in which the following points were noted:

- Private fostering agreements were governed by statute and the sign-off of an agreement was carried out by the local authority. There was a specified time period to complete an assessment. Once all statutory checks had been completed by the relevant department and all departments were satisfied that a suitable arrangement was being made then agreements could be finalised. The Council monitored individuals placed in foster agreements until the age of 16, or 18 for those who had a disability, which is when legal arrangements would end.
- Assurance was provided that once the Council were made aware of a possible private fostering arrangement, there was a clear policy to ensure that the child was visible.
- There was no clear link between the arrangements for private fostering and other fostering agreements in which the Council was responsible for.
- It was acknowledged that the term private fostering could be confusing to members of the public, and many people were not aware of the need to report a private fostering arrangement which is why it was important that Officers continued to communicate the message.
- The definition of family used within fostering agreements was taken from UK Law.

The Head of Fostering and Adoption then set out the Private Fostering Statement of Purpose, which the Council remained committed to in terms of safeguarding children and promoting the welfare of children within Lincolnshire's communities.

The council adopted high standards to ensuring that those arrangements were assessed, suitable and that we the Council acted within the powers that were given within statute.

The statement of purpose sets out what was considered good practice and could be used as a reference point for all professionals and anybody who considers themselves to be in a private fostering arrangement. Customers and members of the public within Lincolnshire could access information and through SharePoint and through the Council's website.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be accepted as an accurate overview of the Council's function in their discharge of responsibilities in terms of private fostering.
2. That a letter on behalf of the Chairman is sent to Foster Carers, thanking them for their efforts and continuous commitment throughout the pandemic be drafted.

36 CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report by the Scrutiny Officer, which invited the Panel to consider its work programme, as set out on pages 127 to 130 of the agenda pack.

In response to a question, it was clarified that the Council had responsibility for the care of unaccompanied refugee children and would ensure that care was provided through foster care or supported accommodation. As unaccompanied minors, refugees would have the same rights and entitlements of any other young person that was looked after in Lincolnshire. The Council would not have any involvement in the care of refugee children who had arrived with their families, unless a support element or safeguarding concern was raised, to which none had been received at the current time. It was agreed that further information be provided to Councillor C Matthews which set out the criteria for the Council to which they would have a duty of care over a child.

It was also clarified that the Council were offering tax relief to care leavers from the age of 21-25. The Panel welcomed the work that was ongoing to provide care leavers with free access to leisure centres owned by District Councils.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be approved.

The meeting closed at 12.32 pm