

**Open Report on behalf of Debbie Barnes, Executive Director of Children's Services**

Report to:	<b>Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date:	<b>09 September 2016</b>
Subject:	<b>Partners in Practice</b>

**Summary:**

This report invites the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to consider the proposed partnership agreement between the Department of Education and Lincolnshire County Council Children's Services as part of the Government's Partner in Practice Programme. The proposals are intended to improve practice in Lincolnshire and other Children's Services by transforming the quality of children's social care services and early help arrangements putting practice excellence and achieving more for the children we serve at its heart.

Our proposals to transform Children's Social are structured around three work-streams with ten separate aspirations for what we wish to achieve over the next 4 years. We passionately believe that these three work-streams will enable Lincolnshire to innovate which will improve our practices and be more child focused, building on our approach for relationship based practice. We also believe that our proposals will support children to thrive in other Local Authority areas as we support improvement elsewhere, whilst using government investment to ensure that we maintain capacity and expertise to drive Lincolnshire's continued improvement.

**The three work-streams are aligned to the DfE's reform programme:**

- i. **Practice and systems** – creating the right environment for excellent practice and innovation to flourish, reducing bureaucracy, whilst creating a culture which prioritises excellent practice, based around the principles of innovation and excellence.
- ii. **Governance and accountability** – developing innovative new organisational models with the potential to radically improve services.
- iii. **People and leadership** – bringing the best people into the profession, and giving them the right knowledge and skills for the incredibly challenging but hugely rewarding work we expect them to do, and developing leaders equipped to nurture practice excellence.

**Actions Required:**

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is invited to consider the proposed partnership agreement between the Department of Education and Lincolnshire County Council Children's Services as one of the Government's Partner in Practice and to determine whether the Committee supports the ten aspirations.

**1. Background**

Creating a culture of innovation is at the heart of the Government's vision for children's social care, and crucial to the delivery of national reforms for children's social care through the three work streams of: People and Leadership, Practice and Systems, and Governance and Accountability. Partners in Practice is at the centre of this vision, representing a genuine partnership between national and local government to help deliver the Government's vision for children's social care reform, which was set out in January 2016 by the Secretary of State. A copy of this vision document is referenced as a background paper.

Lincolnshire was delighted to be confirmed as a Partner in Practice by Government who consider that Partners in Practice (PiP) are high-performing Local Authorities (LAs) who will model excellence and innovation in the delivery of children's social care services. The Partners in Practice programme is intended to evidence about new structural models and practice innovations; support the wider sector; trial the new social work workforce reforms; explore greater freedoms in how they design and deliver their services; and support work looking at how best to measure performance and outcomes. The proposals outlined confirm how Lincolnshire Children's Services would seek to contribute to the Government's aspirations to achieve these objectives.

Children's social care is about changing lives whether by keeping children safe from harm, finding the best possible care when children cannot live at home, or creating the conditions that enable children to thrive and achieve. To make that happen, it is essential that everybody working within children's social care and early help arrangements have the knowledge and skills to do their jobs well, and the organisational leadership and culture to support and challenge them to keep improving.

Lincolnshire is a strong Children's Services and has a proven track record of continuous improvement and good performance. However, the foundation of good Children's Social Care is exceptional early help arrangements and the link between this and safeguarding must never be underestimated. Effective safeguarding occurs within a system of commitment by all agencies that have a role and/or responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people.

Our proposals are structured around three work-streams with 10 separate aspirations for what we wish to achieve over the next 4 years. We passionately believe that these three work-streams will enable Lincolnshire to innovate to

improve our practices and be more child focused, and will support children to thrive in other Local Authority areas as we support improvement elsewhere.

## **2. Proposals**

The proposals for reform are categorised under the three work-streams of Government reform. Under each work-stream, Lincolnshire has a number of aspirations for the programme and these are outlined. Whilst this paper outlines our proposed partnership agreement and therefore sets out how we would wish to further develop Children's Services, each aspiration will be subject to Secretary of State approval.

### **Work-stream 1**

**Practice and systems: We will further improve our safeguarding and early help practices through system innovation, working in partnership with the Department of Education**

#### **Aspiration 1**

**Proposal:** Signs of Safety is well embedded in Lincolnshire but the constraints of Working Together and Ofsted means that it currently has to be used in addition to other existing policy and practice requirements, which leads to extensive duplication and repeated questioning of families. We will redesign social work policy, procedure and practice to place Signs of Safety at the heart of all that we do and remove this duplication.

#### **Why do we want to do this?**

Working Together requires Children's Services to interpret the legislation very precisely. For example, we undertake a single assessment which is heavily prescribed to be undertaken for all referrals. We have been on a journey of implementing Signs of Safety as our methodology for identifying, assessing and mitigating risk, as part of the Innovation Programme. The research and our own evidence confirms that this improves practice and operates in a way which places the child at the centre and more effectively hears the child's voice. To comply with Working Together and the Ofsted framework, we must duplicate practice by undertaking both assessment methodologies.

We welcome an opportunity to fully embrace Signs of safety and for this to replace the existing assessment processes.

#### **Aspiration 2**

**Proposal:** The interface between early help and social care is not fluid enough and does not lend itself to relationship based practice and continuity of relationships and trust for children and families. Section 17 of the Children Act requires that the key worker and the assessment for children open to social care must be a qualified social worker. When a case is open to early help, this generally means the closure of that team and a start again under section 17, or section 47 (child protection enquiry) for a significant event.

We will pilot maintaining the same key worker for each child, supporting children and young people through early help arrangements and through child in need intervention into the lives of families. We will retain qualified social worker as key worker when the criteria for section 17 is met due to higher complexity of need and risk, but will seek to introduce a system of twin tracking across early help and child in need to enable a relationship based practice model to thrive. This will create more flexibility across early help and section 17 (child in need cases) and enable the most appropriate person who can affect change within a family to be the family's lead worker, leading to greater consistency of professional interventions.

### **Why do we want to do this?**

We know that relationship based practice is key to effective intervention; the research shows this as does our local evidence. The right methodology is important, but a consistent individual who has a positive and trusting relationship with the child, family and or young person is what changes lives. Too often, children build a trusting relationship with an individual only to see a handover to another professional. This does not enact a stable system which, we know, children need.

We believe that the person with the most productive trusting relationship with the child should continue to be the key worker unless the risks are so high that statutory intervention is needed. It is clear that when risks escalate to need statutory intervention, the skills and expertise of a qualified Social Worker are needed. However the threshold between early help and section 17 continue to be subject to considerable local debate and this debate deflects the real issue: that of safeguarding the child and promoting their welfare.

We believe that the person with the most effective relationship with the child should be the key worker of the child across early help and section 17. The same level of management oversight and supervision and quality assurance processes regarding timescales MUST continue to be in place. This will enable risks to be mitigated.

### **Aspiration 3**

**Proposal:** We will explore how we can best intervene and support young people who are engaging in risky behaviours to more effectively enact change, outside of child protection arrangements. This will build on the "Research in Practice" findings and would include introducing risk taking panels. We will develop practice based on this research and create a local system which effectively safeguards a young person, but recognises adolescent development and is based on relationship based practice.

### **Why do we want to do this?**

The research from Research in Practice challenges the current system for safeguarding young people who are engaging in risky behaviours. The research argues that using an alternative approach to managing risk in young people is more effective than traditional child protection systems. It further demonstrates that a restorative, relationship based approach, rather than one which "blames" parents would more effectively enact positive change.

This would signal a move away from managing these cases where there is family engagement in child protection, and to manage risk through risk panels. The sector recognises that managing young people engaging in risk taking behaviours is challenging. More and more young people over the age of 13 years are coming into the care of the Local Authority. Families tell us that our current approaches are not empowering and we can learn a great deal from the experiences of survivors of child sexual exploitation and their families. There is an urgent need for an alternative methodology and system for these circumstances, and due to our early help arrangements, we are in a strong position to trial an alternative approach.

#### **Aspiration 4**

**Proposal:** We will implement a proportionate system for the care planning of looked after children. Too many looked after children tell us that they do not enjoy attending their statutory reviews and that they find the process intimidating, with too few engaged. We want to implement an alternative system, which builds on the positive relationship between the child's social worker and the young person and which empowers a young person's engagement. We recognise that the majority of looked after children are in stable placements, that their outcomes are being met and their life chances improved. For these looked after children, we want a proportionate system which reduces unnecessary bureaucracy and which enables flexibility so the most appropriate professional mechanism is used to enable a statutory review to be completed. Independent Reviewing Officers would focus their capacity on those children and young people whose needs are more complex and greater oversight and scrutiny is needed. The principal request is for a flexible, proportionate system towards care planning based on a child's needs.

#### **Why do we want to do this?**

Too many looked after children tell us that they do not enjoy attending their statutory reviews and that they find the process intimidating, with too few engaged. We want to implement an alternative system, which builds on the positive relationship between the child's social worker and the young person and which empowers a young person's engagement. The principal request is for a flexible, proportionate system towards care planning based on a child's needs.

#### **Aspiration 5**

**Proposal:** This proposal focuses on improving life chances for looked after children. We recognise that education is the pathway out of poverty, so looked after children MUST have access to high quality educational placement to enable them to have access to good life chances. This work, although not directly related to child protection, will introduce a holistic approach to promoting educational outcomes for looked after children, not trialled anywhere in the UK to date. It will bring carers and professionals together to understand how to all be educational champions whilst supporting schools to be able to understand how best to manage the behaviours and attachment needs of looked after children.

We will create an innovative and sustainable multi-disciplinary approach to improving academic outcomes, progress, life choices and opportunities for all

Lincolnshire children in care. We will do this through the development and implementation of a clearly defined strategy (Learning Placements and Caring Schools – Improving Education Outcomes for Children in Care) that will support schools to be able to nurture and promote attachment and support foster carers to give children a thirst for learning so that education is cherished and encouraged. We want all Lincolnshire **schools to be Caring Schools** and we want all **social care placements to be Learning Placements**.

**Why do we want to do this?**

"For children to thrive and flourish, and realise their potential, and particularly where they have had very difficult early childhoods, they need to be cared for in school and educated at home" *Claire Cameron, (2015) Educating Children and Young People in Care*

The underperformance of children in care measured against their peers who have not been in care is a national/regional/local priority. Performance indicators nationally and locally have not improved markedly over these past three years and a new approach is required that focuses upon faster rates of academic progress and a recognition that once our children are safe a greater emphasis upon the development of key skills is needed to increase opportunity.

Lincolnshire has a desire for all of our young people to fulfil their potential regardless of where placed and to make better than expected progress whilst in care. Strong inter agency working is already a major aspect of our work but more needs to be done. Performance of a child in care is not just an educational matter. A new dynamic is required whereby the language of academic progress is shared across disciplines and foster carers and which recognises that schools need an alternative nurturing methodology which is located on encouraging attachments and where foster carers recognise their responsibility to promote education and a thirst for life - long learning.

**Aspiration 6**

**Proposal:** We will explore greater integration in how we support young people who are involved in criminal behaviour: bringing together education, support and enforcement. Young offenders are children and young people first and there needs to be a more holistic assessment and care planning approach to better meet their needs. We want to create a system where the worker with the best relationship with the young person, the professional who can create a relationship to change behaviour, should be the young person's key worker. The current approach which requires young people in some circumstances to have two allocated social workers does not support relationship based practice. In addition, we want a single approach to the identification and management of risk. We want to explore streamlining risk management methodologies, building on our methodology of Signs of Safety.

**Why do we want to do this?**

One of our core principles in our operating model is to adopt a relationship based approach to working with young people. We know that Signs of Safety offers a robust methodology to our work and that relationships are the foundations for

effective safeguarding work. To create the culture for relationship based practice to thrive, it is important to minimise the number of changes of workers, who have a relationship with a young person. The right person supporting a vulnerable young person is what is important. It is, therefore, not always considered to be in the best interest of a young person to introduce a new worker if the young person is involved in the criminal justice system or who needs to be open to Children Services. Where the case is open to Children's Services or Youth Offending, there should be a single worker with the required skills to work with the young person to enact change and a single approach to the assessment and management of risk. We would seek to adopt Signs of Safety as the single agreed methodology for the identification and management of risk rather than using the ASSET model.

## **Work-stream 2**

**Governance and accountability: Working with the DfE, we will explore alternative delivery models so that our structural form is sustainable and responsive to the changing needs of public sector organisations**

### **Aspiration 7**

**Proposal:** We will develop a business plan to explore the benefits of establishing an alternative delivery mechanism for Children Services which recognises the changing nature of public sector organisations and which explores opportunities for more collaborative working. This will inform national and local policy as it will explore potential future collaboration opportunities and associated structures to facilitate this.

#### **Why do we want to do this?**

Lincolnshire County Council has a track record of introducing new models through commissioning and has stated its aspirations to be a commissioning council. We wish to explore if alternative models open up opportunities for greater collaboration to drive efficiencies and improvement.

## **Work-stream 3**

**Working with the DfE, we will nurture talent across the system so the workforce is skilled to enact changes in the lives of families so children and young people can thrive.**

### **Aspiration 8**

**Proposal:** We will implement the assessment and accreditation programme for Social Workers which will provide a national, practice focused, career pathway based on the highest levels of skill and knowledge.

#### **Why do we want to do this?**

Lincolnshire is proud of its workforce and strives to continually support its Social Workers to thrive and deliver outstanding practice. The Government is committed to developing a national, practice focused, career pathway based on the highest

levels of skill and knowledge and we are committed to offering this to our workforce.

### **Aspiration 9**

**Proposal:** We would like to explore the adoption of a national leaders programme in social work to drive improvement across the sector. Accreditation of Practice Leaders is modelled on the National Leaders in Education (NLE's). We believe the concept is applicable to social work.

#### **Why do we want to do this?**

The DfE encourages Headteachers of outstanding schools to apply to be a national leader of education (NLE). In this role, National Leaders support schools in challenging circumstances, in addition to leading their own school and driving practice improvement. The aim of the national leaders of education programme is to increase the leadership capacity of other schools to help raise standards. This is one part of the government's plan to give schools a central role in developing a self-improving and sustainable school system.

We will look to develop this model to improve Children Services. It will provide development opportunities for experienced practitioners to innovate, and support improvement in other Local Authorities whilst offering career development opportunities for staff. We have a strong leadership team, but some will wish to explore career development through leaving Lincolnshire which is something that they would rather not do. This type of programme enables staff to flourish and enhance their career whilst clearly identifying leaders in the system to work in services which need improving. Through their drive and ambition, Lincolnshire Children's Services would continue to benefit from their skills and expertise.

### **Aspiration 10**

**Proposal:** We welcome collaboration being a key part of improvement where good Children's Services work with other Children's Services to provide high-quality diagnosis of what is needed for improvement, with advice, guidance and monitoring as well as training and development to the workforce to drive effectiveness.

#### **Why do we want to do this?**

We are fortunate that our Children's Services safeguarding system across England has many, very important strengths. Inspection and research advises that effective safeguarding is based on strong multi-agency work, focused on the needs of the child and effective, well-led local partnerships/alliances at both strategic and operational levels.

The system must ensure that all children are safe, regardless of where they live which is why we need to strengthen our commitment to confronting its weaknesses and providing a more collaborative system where strong services can support others.

We would like to trial the introduction of an improvement system which is aligned to the Teaching School model which has been introduced into the school system.

**3. Conclusion**

The Partners in Practice proposals outline our 10 aspirations for what we wish to achieve over the next 4 years. We passionately believe that the three work-streams will enable Lincolnshire to innovate to improve our practices and be more child focused, and will support children to thrive in other Local Authority areas as we support improvement elsewhere.

Our proposals are aligned to the DfE's reform programme and seek to create the right environment for excellent practice and innovation to flourish, whilst reducing bureaucracy. They will explore innovative new organisational models with the potential to radically improve services and build capacity, giving our staff the right knowledge, skills and opportunities to nurture practice excellence in our own and other areas.

Following consideration of the proposals, the Committee is requested to consider whether it supports the proposed partnership agreement between the Department of Education and Lincolnshire County Council Children's Services as one of the Government's Partner in Practice.

**4. Consultation**

**a) Policy Proofing Actions Required**

Not applicable

**5. Background Papers**

The following background papers as defined in the Local Government Act 1972 were relied upon in the writing of this report.

Document title	Where the document can be viewed
Children's social care reform: A vision for change - January 2016 - Department for Education	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-reform-a-vision-for-change">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-reform-a-vision-for-change</a>

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