

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR H R JOHNSON (CHAIRMAN)

Councillors Mrs C M H Farquharson, J D Hough and S F Williams

External Members:

Jean Burbidge (Lincolnshire Community Health Services), Polly Coombes (Foster Carer), Beth Tibbles-Hammond (Children in Care Council)

Officers/invited guests in attendance: Councillor D Brailsford (Executive Support Councillor for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning), Karen Bailey (Looked After Children's Education Services Manager), Dave Clarke (Unit Principal, Lincolnshire Secure Unit), Sheridan Dodsworth (Head of Service for Children with Disabilities), John Harris (Joint Head of Service for Regulated Services), Linda Harrison (Customer Relations & Complaints Manager), Colin Hopkirk (Participation Officer), Laura Hyatt (Regulation 33 Officer), Tracy Johnson (Scrutiny Officer), Kerry Mitchell (Leaving Care Manager, Barnardo's), Janice Spencer (Assistant Director Children's Services), Barbara Starns (Team Manager, Independent Chairs), Catherine Wilman (Democratic Services Officer)

48. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J R Hicks, R A Shore and A P Williams, Samantha Edwards (Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust), Ted Normandale (National Youth Advocacy Service), Mrs M Graham-Williams (Foster Carer)

Apologies for absence were also received from Councillor Mrs P A Bradwell (Executive Councillor for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning)

The following officers also submitted their apologies: Theresa Buhryn (Performance Development and Reviewing Officer), Clive Chambers (Assistant Director Children's Services, Barnardo's Midlands Region), Tara Jones (Joint Head of Service for Regulated Services)

49. DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTEREST

No declarations of Members' interests were made at this stage of proceedings.

50. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 JANUARY 2013

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 17 January 2013 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

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51. VOICES FOR CHOICES (V4C) MINUTES (THE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN COUNCIL) HELD ON 19 FEBRUARY 2013

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Voices for Choices (the Looked After Children Council) meeting held on 19 February 2013. It was reported there had been a number of new members on the Voices for Choices Executive since the last meeting.

Colin Hopkirk took the Panel through the minutes.

RESOLVED

That the minutes from the Voices for Choices Executive meeting held on 19 February 2013 be noted.

52. VOICES FOR CHOICES (V4C) HALF YEARLY REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

The Panel considered V4C's half yearly report which had been prepared by Colin Hopkirk in consultation with Beth Tibbles-Hammond, the Chair of V4C.

During discussion of the report, the following points were noted:

- The Coming into Care Kit was in the process of being made into a web-based version with a steering group from V4C assisting in the process. Dan Hawbrook, E-Safety Officer was supporting the project;
- Executive members had been involved in designing and delivering a training session for Masters in Social Work students focussing on what children and young people needed from social workers. Recollections of the young people's experiences of separation and loss felt during their time in care had upset some of the students. Members enquired whether the training could be repeated for Panel members following the County Council elections;
- The FAB! Awards 2013 had seen the best turnout since the annual awards competition began, despite inclement weather;
- In answer to a question, it was reported that the new adoption legislation had strengthened the voice of the child in care, rather than diminishing it. The legislation aimed to recruit adopters more quickly;
- Three members from the Panel would be invited to the Big Conversation 5 event to be held in July. The Scrutiny Officer agreed to email the new Panel members about the Big Conversation 5 event after the County Council elections.

RESOLVED

That the Voices for Choices Half Yearly Report be noted.

53. VISITING MEMBERS LOG 2012-13 – QUARTERLY REPORT

Consideration was given to a report which detailed the visits to Lincolnshire children's homes from April 2012 to March 2013.

Issues were reported regarding an overgrown wooded area near the children's home at Albion Street, Spalding where people had been congregating to drink alcohol. Some children living at the home had reported being accosted by the drinkers and it was confirmed that cutting back the wooded area was a priority to be dealt with in April and a contractor had been identified. It was queried whether the incidents involving the children had been reported to the police. This would be followed up.

Some councillors on the Panel would not be standing in the forthcoming election and questions were raised regarding plans for transferring visiting duties to newly elected councillors. In response to this, it was confirmed that training would be provided to new visitors and DBS checks (formerly known as CRB) would have to be undertaken.

RESOLVED

That the Visiting Member's Log 2012-2013 – Quarterly Report and comments made be noted.

54. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) HEALTH ASSESSMENT PROGRESS REPORT

Consideration was given to a report which provided progress information on looked after children's health assessments from 1 April – 30 September 2012.

The Panel discussed health related issues in relation to looked after children and the following points were noted:

- Looked after children placed in Lincolnshire by external Local Authorities received health assessments, the cost of which was claimed back from the parent authority. The reasons for these placements was thought to be due to low placement availability in other counties;
- Ensuring looked after children were up to date with immunisations in line with local and national programmes could be a challenge, especially with teenagers who could not be forced into having them and who were old enough to understand the reasons for vaccinations.

RESOLVED

That the Looked After Children Health Assessment Progress Report be noted.

55. HALF YEARLY REPORT OF THE REGULATION 33 SERVICE – OCTOBER 2012 TO MARCH 2013

Consideration was given to a report which provided a summary on Regulation 33 visits during the period October 2012 to March 2013. During presentation of the report, the following was noted:

- Staff had been deployed to help with two young people who had issues with suicide or self-harm;
- Staff had been seconded between homes to help them see different ways of working;

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- 51 Eastgate was now fully staffed;
- Albion Street had been given approval for a seventh bed;
- There had been no health and safety issues;
- Peer reviews had been led by Jessica Spry and had used a method of recording the views of children at Strut House. The same method would be used in other homes.

RESOLVED

That the Regulation 33 Summary Report be noted.

56. QUARTER THREE REPORT ON THE FOSTERING SERVICE – OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2012

The Panel considered a report which outlined the activity in the fostering service during Quarter three from October to December 2012. During discussion of the report, the following points were noted:

- Payments to foster carers varied to acknowledge difficult and challenging placements. Younger children were more challenging due to autism, foetal alcohol syndrome or behaviours picked up from home.
- The number of looked after children had increased since December 2012 and the figure may have increased again since this time;
- Stability of placements was an issue after two years.
- Financial pressures had meant that not as many volunteers were coming forward as foster carers;
- Following an active recruitment campaign for remand carers and six firm applications, only one person had been recruited so far. Unfulfilled requests were not a financial issue, but an issue of capacity. Looked after children needed alternative respite care whilst their foster carers were away. A review was being undertaken and the results of the implementation of any changes would be brought back to the July meeting.

RESOLVED

That the report be accepted as a record of the fostering service for October to December 2012.

57. ADOPTION SERVICE SIX MONTHLY REPORT

Consideration was given to a report which provided the Panel with an update of the work of the Adoption Service in accordance with the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, National Minimum Standards 2003, 2011 and the Adoption Act 2002.

Adoption scorecards were introduced as part of a new approach to address delays in the adoption system set out in An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay (published in March 2012). The Council's performance against the scorecard was good and significantly better than neighbouring authorities.

RESOLVED

That the report and comments made be noted.

58. OFSTED SERVICE REPORT – CHILDREN’S HOMES

At the last meeting of the Panel, a report had been requested to provide a summary and update on the recent OFSTED Reports for each of the Children’s Homes and Lincolnshire Secure Unit. The Panel considered the report and the following points were noted:

- Managers of the care homes met with the Dave Clarke (Unit Principal, Lincolnshire Secure Unit) on a regular basis and enabled good practice within the authority to be shared;
- All the homes had received ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ overall ratings from Ofsted;
- Two children had been committed to mental health institutions during recent months and as a result, some good work had been undertaken with CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) which had improved massively over recent years;
- The Chairman requested that special thanks from the Panel be sent to all the managers and staff at the homes.

RESOLVED

That the report and comments made be noted.

59. COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS RECEIVED FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Consideration was given to a report which provided the Panel with information on the compliments, comments and complaints received regarding looked after children for the period from 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2012. During discussion of the report, the following points were noted:

- In the period January to December 2012, 3 complaints had been received from young people in care. No compliments or comments had been received. It was reported that on receipt of complaints, Officers would attempt to resolve complaints before they were progressed on to further stages;
- Members felt it was a positive sign that complaints were being received as it meant that children and young people in care were aware of how to make a complaint and felt confident doing so;
- Investigators now had access to Legal Services for advice.

RESOLVED

That the report and comments made be noted.

60. CARE LEAVERS APPRENTICESHIP SCHEME

The Panel considered a report providing an update on the Care Leaver's Apprenticeship Scheme which had been running since 2007 and during that time had seen 57 starters. During discussion of the report, the following points were noted:

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- The scheme had been recognised by the JobCentre as good practice;
- A work preparation course had been run over the Christmas period in 2012 but had not had good attendance and had limited staff availability. The timing of this programme had now been changed to try and alleviate this;
- A section on going to work featured in the scheme which included details such as understanding payslips and workplace etiquette;
- There was currently no guidance on how to encourage young people in care to enrol on the scheme if they were resistant;
- An event with training providers had been organised for the end of May 2013 which would explain what the scheme provided for looked after young people.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

61. CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME 2013

A report by the Scrutiny Officer was considered, which invited the Corporate Parenting Panel to consider its work programme for the coming months.

The Panel was informed that the next meeting was scheduled to take place on 18 July 2013. It was suggested that at the July meeting it might be useful for the Panel to consider what its priorities would be for the next four years. It was also suggested that a training event to educate members on what children in care need could be held at the July or October meeting.

The Vice Chairman announced that he would not be standing in the coming County Council elections and as such thanked the Officers involved with the Panel for their dedication to children in care.

RESOLVED

That the work programme as presented be approved.

The meeting closed at 12.30 p.m.