



**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
26 APRIL 2019**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR R L FOULKES (CHAIRMAN)

Councillors R J Kendrick (Vice-Chairman), B Adams, Mrs W Bowkett, Mrs J E Killey, C Matthews, A P Maughan, L Wootten and R Wootten.

Added Members

Church Representatives: Mr S C Rudman.

Councillors: Mrs P A Bradwell OBE and D Brailsford were also in attendance.

Officers in attendance:-

Simon Evans (Health Scrutiny Officer), Charlotte Gray (Children's Commissioning Manager - Commercial Services), John Harris (Children's Service Manager - Regulated - North and Fostering), Teri Marshall (Senior Commissioning Officer, Transport Commissioning Team), Heather Sandy (Interim Director of Education), Sally Savage (Chief Commissioning Officer - Children's Services) and Rachel Wilson (Democratic Services Officer).

65 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE / REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M D Boles, M T Fido, S R Parkin and M A Whittington.

Apologies were also received from Mrs P J Barnet and Miss A E I Sayer (Parent Governor Representatives).

66 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTEREST

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

**67 MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD ON 8 MARCH 2019**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2019 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

68 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR FOR ADULT CARE, HEALTH AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND CHIEF OFFICERS

The Executive Councillor for Adult Care, Health and Children's Services reported that the authority was currently undergoing an Ofsted inspection, and it was noted that this was the third visit to Lincolnshire of the year. Members were advised that this time the inspectors were looking at early help social care.

It was reported that it had recently been announced that the University of Lincoln had been successful in its bid to become an Institute of Technology. The bid had been made by the University and local further education colleges with the support of the Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership. The Institute would focus on developing technical skills for the agri-food, manufacturing, engineering and digital industries. It had been agreed that, due to the rural nature of the county, Lincolnshire would have seven sites which would be based in colleges around the county, including North Lincolnshire. Members were advised that a report would be made to the Committee when more information was available. The Executive Councillor and Interim Director for Education were keen to get schools involved at an early stage to encourage those students that may be looking for a more technical career path. It was highlighted that there had been 112 bids submitted and only 12 areas selected, so for Lincolnshire to be one of those areas was very positive.

One member commented that they had advocated for a long time that there should be a move away from the focus on degree level learning as a lot of students were likely to benefit from a more practical approach. If this was a move back to people gaining technical qualifications then this was positive. There was a need to get across to schools and colleges that there were other qualifications and career paths than going to university.

Members were advised that the post 16 and post 19 landscape was evolving, and not all of the information about the different options was getting through to parents, and this was perhaps where the council could be supportive. There were now so many diverse opportunities for young people.

It was reported that a network of careers hubs was being established, and the Council was working with the Local Enterprise Partnership on this. A report would be brought back to the Committee on this in due course.

The Executive Support Councillor for Children's Services reported that there would be a paper submitted to the Council Meeting on 17 May 2019 in relation to the Corporate Parenting Sub-Group, proposing a name change to the Corporate Parenting Panel, and an increase in the frequency of meetings to six per year. It was also reported that the meetings would also be open to the public.

The role of visiting members was discussed, and it was noted that there would be an update session for visiting members after the close of the meeting. Any members who wished to visit a children's home in their area would be welcomed and it was

suggested that they should either arrange it with their local visiting member or the appropriate officer.

69 FOSTERING ALLOWANCES

The Committee received a report which invited members to consider a report on Fostering Allowances which was due to be considered by the Executive Councillor for Adult Care, Health and Children's Services on 17 May 2019. Members were informed that it was proposed to increase the Foster Care rates by 2% for 2019/20 and in order to recognise and encourage the retention of foster carers, it was further proposed to introduce an annual retention payment for all foster carers who completed the relevant training and had a successful annual review. This approach would be open to all foster carers who were able to demonstrate acquired skills and experience during the year and would be endorsed at the annual review. It was specifically focussed on mainstream foster carers as a means of recruitment and retention.

It was reported that some of the long standing foster carers were now getting older or suffering from ill health and were no longer able to carry on fostering. Therefore, there was a need to be able to sustain those foster carers that the authority currently had and ensure that they were still around in 5 years or more.

Members 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 noted that this would be a retention payment, but that there was also a team of people around the foster carer to support them including a supervising social worker, placement support workers as well as being able to draw on services through Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.
- As well as trying to recruit more foster carers, the authority was also trying to ensure it retained them as well.
- It was queried whether there was a target for how many foster carers the authority wanted to recruit. It was noted that this was an issue of sufficiency and the number of Looked After Children coming to the authority. However, it was planned to build in some degree of flexibility.
- It was noted that there was one organisation which paid foster carers £450 per week, and it was queried how commercial organisations were able to offer this amount of money. Members were advised that this would be reflected in the charges paid by the relevant local authority, and children from other areas of the country could be placed in Lincolnshire. The county council wanted their foster carers to foster children from Lincolnshire. People should not be able to profit from vulnerable children, but it was important that Lincolnshire County Council's remained attractive.
- It was noted that the County Council was focused on having its own foster carers, but some other councils did not make as much effort to recruit and were happy to pay for independent providers.
- Members were advised that some people made a choice to be a foster carer rather than work, and in some cases their service had exceeded 25 years.

- It was queried whether it was harder to recruit foster carers as the county had such high employment. Officers believed that this was affected by employment levels, but there was no official data to confirm this.
- It was queried how a decision to recommend Option 2 (introduction of retention payments) had been made and whether there was any benchmarking information. Members were advised that payment for skills was a model that was used by a lot of authorities, but it could be difficult to administer as there would be different levels of foster carers and delivery in Lincolnshire would be too complex. It was felt that it would take away the choice element that Lincolnshire foster carers had.
- There was a move towards encouraging carers to undertake more training in order to professionalise fostering. It was noted that most people became foster carers as they were motivated to give back to the community and it was rarely about money. A number of foster carers would leave after 3 – 4 years, and the aim was to see more foster carers stay with the council for 10 – 15 years.
- It was queried whether Lincolnshire was the first local authority to offer a retention payment, and officers reported that they believed this was an innovative approach as many authorities used the tiered system. There was currently no benchmarking information that would suggest that this would work, but was a judgement made following discussions with existing foster carers. However, members were reminded that Lincolnshire was still benchmarked as one of the highest performing authorities for value for money in relation to fostering. It was highlighted that the report did not include information about the discussions which had taken place with current foster carers and it was suggested that it would have been beneficial to see what they actually thought about the proposal.
- The Executive Councillor for Adult Care, Health and Children's Services advised that she was the Chair of the Lead Members for Children's Services group for East Midlands Councils, and confirmed that Lincolnshire was the most pro-active in terms of foster carers. It was commented that Leicestershire County Council had to send a lot of their looked after children out of county for fostering. It was noted that a lot of other authorities came to Lincolnshire to see what the authority was doing.
- There was a comment that the proposal was good in principle, but some more evidence on benchmarking might have been included in the report.
- It was queried whether, when accepting children from other authorities, whether they were charged the same price as if they were going to a private provider. Members were advised that Lincolnshire's foster carers were there to take children that LCC needed to place. Occasionally, if a child needed to be placed from out of county, that authority would be charged a reasonable rate.
- It was confirmed that priority would be given to placing Lincolnshire children with foster carers in the county.
- It was not possible for foster carers to be registered with both a private fostering agency and the county council. There were very strict protocols in place if anyone wanted to leave one fostering body to move to another.

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- In terms of governance arrangements for private providers, it was queried what safeguards were in place for the council. Members were advised that the independent sector was subject to Ofsted inspection and registration. There would be a contract in place with the provider which would be subject to monitoring and stringent regulation.
- It was commented that it was an interesting and innovative idea, and if it was deemed to be viable, then there was no issue. Lincolnshire was seen as an innovative council, and so needed to look at things which were slightly different.
- It was suggested that there was a need to be careful about paying people and then them not being available. The primary motivator for people undertaking this role should not be money, but the desire to help young people.
- It was queried whether the authority had any commitment to work place pensions in relation to foster carers, and members were advised that it did not, however, there were tax breaks available to foster carers. It was noted that this was the case as they were not employed, and the majority of foster carers would not want a contract of employment.
- It was noted that this payment was an incentive, but what was most important was the value added by the support and training which was also provided. It was commented that it was thought that this was the right model. Whilst foster carers might receive a higher allowance working for the independent sector, many foster carers were motivated by the difference they made to the lives of vulnerable children and young people.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee support the recommendations to the Executive Councillor for Adult Care, Health and Children's Services as set out in the report.
2. That information on the foster allowance schemes operated in the East Midlands Councils be circulated to the Committee.

70 POST 16 TRANSPORT POLICY STATEMENT 2019-20

The Committee received a report which invited members to consider a report on the Post 16 Transport Policy Statement 2019-20 prior to consideration by the Executive Councillor for Adult Care, Health and Children's Services on 29 April 2019.

It was reported that the Council provided subsidised transport for learners of sixth form age (extended to age 25 for learners with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND)) to a school sixth form, college of further education or other approved setting. This cost the Council c£3m per year and a proportion of the cost (c£1m) was recovered through a charge to parents or students which was currently £570 per annum (£579 if paid in instalments). Members were advised that the report set out the Council's proposed Post 16 Transport Policy Statement 2019/20 (the Policy) as required by section 509AA of the Education Act 1996. This Policy must be published by the Council every year by 31st May.

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Members were informed that the Policy continued to offer the same provision of transport as previous years and also proposed to keep the parent/student contribution at the same level as the previous two years.

The Committee 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 during discussion included the following:

- It was welcomed that the charge would not be increased for the coming year.
- One member expressed an interpretation of the policy as appearing to penalise young people who wanted to carry on learning. It was acknowledged that the Council was following national guidance, and it was queried what conversations had been held with other local authorities on this issue. It was noted that benchmarking of the charges compared to other areas had taken place, and Lincolnshire remained one of the lowest of its geographical and statistical neighbours.
- It was commented by a member that some of the designated transport areas (DTA's) for post-16 transport needed to be refreshed to tie them in with the school transport DTA's for 11 – 16 year olds. However, members were advised that the post-16 DTA needed to be different as it had to include colleges and schools with sixth forms.
- It was noted that the charge had been assessed as being affordable and it was queried how this was done, as particularly for those households with multiple children in post 16 education, this could become prohibitively expensive. It was queried whether there was support for parents in this situation. Officers noted this concern and continued to explore alternative methods of payment for families. It was noted that the option of paying by direct debit was being explored and parents/students could now pay for travel in six instalments. For those families on low incomes, bursaries were provided to sixth forms and colleges who could choose to cover the cost of transport for some students, which would then be paid directly to the County Council. It was confirmed that individual circumstances would be considered, including any cases of hardship.
- It was confirmed that Care to Learn was a Government-funded scheme providing support to parents aged under 20, to enable them to access education.
- The Committee was advised that it was not a statutory duty to provide post-16 transport and the council did not receive any specific funding from the government for any post-16 transport (total cost to the authority of £25m per year). It was reported that most councils did charge for post-16 transport. There was a need to weigh up what the council needed to do, as it did not have sufficient funding to be able to provide free transport for post-16 education.
- It was queried whether there was scope for a review in future to look at offering support to multi-child households.
- It was noted that once the policy was agreed, then officers would be able to consider individual circumstances on a case by case basis through its appeals process.

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- Members commented that they were happy to support this policy, and were satisfied that there was the flexibility to be able to meet those anomalies. It was better to offer some sort of transport support rather than it being withdrawn. However, it was raised that more pressure should be put on the government so that children were able to have the same opportunities.
- There was a need for the government to acknowledge that rural areas, such as Lincolnshire, needed to make additional provisions for school transport when compared with urban authorities.
- It was commented that it would be useful if a way could be found for the charge to be paid in 12 instalments, as this would help with affordability. Members were advised that officers were currently working on this.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee support the recommendations to the Executive Councillor for Adult Care, Health and Children's Services as set out in the report.
2. That comments be passed to the Executive Councillor for Adult Care, Health and Children's Services in relation to the need for work be undertaken to allow parents to pay for the transport in instalments by direct debit.

71 REFRESH OF LINCOLNSHIRE'S ALL-AGE AUTISM STRATEGY

Consideration was given to a report which presented members with details of the refresh of Lincolnshire's All-Age Autism Strategy. It was reported that in April 2015, Lincolnshire's first All-Age Autism Strategy had been launched in response to the government's national Adult Autism Strategy for England and its accompanying Statutory Guidance.

It was noted that this was a three year strategy and was jointly developed by Lincolnshire County Council, the four Lincolnshire Clinical Commissioning Group's and the Lincolnshire Autism Partnership Board (LAPB) following a comprehensive period of engagement and consultation activity with multi-agency stakeholders, autistic people and family members/carers. This three year period had now come to an end and it was necessary to refresh the strategy taking into account both the national and local focus around this agenda.

Members 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 to what extent did the virtual school get involved, and members were advised that there was a Working Together Team which specifically supported schools who were working with children who were on the autism spectrum.
- It was noted that the vast majority of children with autism were thriving in mainstream schools. Members were also advised that across all special schools, there were children with autism whose needs were being met.
- There was a lot of support and training for foster carers around challenging behaviour and trauma. It was noted that autism awareness featured in this as well.

- It was suggested that autism awareness training would be beneficial to all members, not just visiting members.
- It was noted that there was a need to be aware that autism was a spectrum disorder, and so people would have different levels of need.
- There was a need for a person centred approach, and for schools to work with the individual rather than have one approach for a number of students with autism.
- It was noted that the councillor development session on autism awareness on 26 June 2019 would include two autistic people as presenters.
- One member commented that they had found the training they received on autism when they became a visiting member very valuable.
- The Strategy was now in place for a further three years, but the action plan would be reviewed on an annual basis, and would be a living document, especially as the national strategy was in the process of being refreshed.
- Members were advised that the decision to have an All-Age Strategy had been determined following a public consultation, which had highlighted the need to address the service provision for children and young people moving through the transition to adulthood.
- Lincolnshire Young Voices Group had launched the previous year and included children and young people with autism. This group would help to inform any changes needed to improve services and support.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

72 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

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

It was reported that there was an addition of a pre-decision item for the 7 June 2019 meeting which was the Child Adolescent Mental Health Service agreement which was due to be considered at the meeting of the Executive in July. There were no other changes to the upcoming work programme.

Members were advised that as the authority was currently undergoing an inspection from Ofsted, it was expected that the report and action plan would be brought back to the Committee in October 2019.

RESOLVED

That the work programme as set out in appendix A to the report be agreed subject to the inclusion of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Agreement which was for pre-decision scrutiny.

The meeting closed at 11.55 a.m.

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