

**REPORT FOR THE  
INDEPENDENT VISTING SERVICE**

**April 2019- September 2019**

**Dawn Oldroyd and Eska Verleg**

**Regulation 44 Visitors**

## **Basis of report**

This report is being prepared in order to provide the Corporate Parenting Panel with an update of the work of the Independent Visitor.

## **Introduction**

Part six, regulation 43 of the Children's Home Regulation 2015 makes provision for the appointment of an Independent Visitor. There remains an expectation that the appointment of an Independent Visitor will continue to be the responsibility of the Local Authority, with clear guidance being offered as to the criteria which must be met in terms of ensuring the visitor's independence is clearly demonstrable. The visits continue to be required to be made on a monthly basis.

Within the regulations it is expected the Independent Visitor will report on the quality standards in specified areas. These can be summarised as follows:-

- (a) the quality and purpose of care standard (see regulation 6);
- (b) the children's views, wishes and feelings standard (see regulation 7);
- (c) the education standard (see regulation 8);
- (d) the enjoyment and achievement standard (see regulation 9);
- (e) the health and well-being standard (see regulation 10);
- (f) the positive relationships standard (see regulation 11);
- (g) the protection of children standard (see regulation 12);
- (h) the leadership and management standard (see regulation 13);
- (i) the care planning standard (see regulation 14).

The Independent Visitor continues to be expected to provide a report following each visit. Part six, regulation 44 of the Children's Homes Regulations provides for the reporting of the standards.

The Regulation 44 report maintained its format providing a succinct summary of the homes under the signs of safety headings. The recommendations following each visit are noted under two headings. Under the 'What needs to happen' the Visitor notes all the difficulties, shortfalls that have been observed during a particular visit. Some of these issues, the ones that may have potential significant impact on the young people or may represent a risk, are reiterated under the formal Recommendations section. Also issues that have been consistently raised under 'What needs to happen' but not acted upon by the homes may also become a Recommendation. The use of two tiers allows for an approach that signals any potential difficulties, including one-off matters in time for the home to consider and address timely, before it becomes a problem. The Recommendations therefore gain more weight and represent the urgency and importance of it being acted on without

delay. For a period a slightly modified version was trialled, where the recommendations tier has been removed, but maintained the 'What needs to happen' tier, however it is felt by the visitors that valuable information that did not represent immediate concerns, got left behind and as a result it is currently being reviewed again to ensure that all information is given its rightful place and no information is missed or lost in the format of the report.

The structure of the report conclusion has been revised to ensure that actions identified as needing to happen are clearly outlined with timescales to ensure they are monitored and completed with a clear audit trail.

### **The Independent Visitor**

Since April 2019 Regulation 44 visits have been undertaken by two Independent Reviewing Officers (Visitors) following the retirement of David Proudlove (Visitor). Dawn Oldroyd and Eska Verleg continue to share the visiting duties to the 7 homes, by visiting 4 and 3 homes respectively for a consecutive 4-6 months, after which the two Visitors will change homes for a further 4-6 months period. There has been the launch of a new supported living scheme in Grantham providing accommodation in two houses for 5 young people aged 16-18 for a period of up to six months. This accommodation is to be inspected under the Regulation 44 process however this is 'a light touch' exercise every 4 months.

Ildiko Kiss, Team Manager, has now returned from maternity leave and has resumed management oversight of the Regulation 44 scheme.

Monthly visits have continued within timescales and Dawn and Eska maintain positive working relationships with care home managers, staff and young people. The consistency has enabled them to allay worries and concerns regarding the inspection process, working collaboratively to highlight what's working well and address issues within the homes that contribute to the effective care of the young people. The Visitors have continued to observe shift handovers, team meetings and key worker team discussions to gain further insight into practice within the homes. Weekend visits and conducting visits on different days and different times and around festive events have been beneficial in reflecting the home routines and dynamics. The Visitors speak with key stakeholders including the young people, parents, social workers, health and education partners and other relevant individuals to gain an holistic appraisal of the homes.

Dawn and Eska continue to maintain positive working relationships with the home management teams including the new Registered Managers at Beacon and Albion Street.

Visitor reports reflect the implementation of Signs of Safety across the authority, in the summary highlighting: what's working well, what we're worried about, what needs

to happen (good practice suggestions, emerging issues, matters in progress). This ensures consistency of practice within a framework that all staff utilise within children's services. Recommendations from previous reports are reviewed to ensure that progress is being made within reasonable timescales, where issues remain outstanding Visitors continue to challenge Home Managers to ensure these are being addressed, additionally the Regulated Homes Service Manager has sight of all reports ensuring additional support can be given if required. Progress in respect of Social Pedagogy and Restorative Practice are also reflected within the reports and successes highlighted.

The dispute resolution procedure is now in place ensuring that any disagreements are resolved in a timely manner between the Independent Review service and senior managers for the care homes. The process enables the Visitor to retain independence as the process is overseen at an Assistant Director level. This has been used effectively over the last 6 months whereby issues have been resolved efficiently.

The Visitors have attended two Homes Manager Meeting and this was felt to be a positive contribution and the hope is to continue this on a more regular basis to promote the role of the Visitor and to discuss thematic issues arising amongst the homes countywide.

The Visitors and the Acting Team Manager, Paul Fisher, met with Ros Chapman, Ofsted Inspector, in April 2019 to discuss the Regulation 44 process and to gain feedback and insight from the Ofsted perspective of the reports provided by Lincolnshire County Council with a view to improving and developing the service we provide. The meeting was useful and enabled the Visitors to build a relationship with the Ofsted inspector and provided positive and useful feedback about the quality of the reports being provided and where potential beneficial developments could be made. The inspector reported that the information that is provided in the report was helpful and informative and in a format that is useful and easily accessible. She reported positively about the quality and format of the reports. She also commented on the marked improvement over the past year in terms of the timeliness in the production of the reports. This is also an on-going issue that the Visitors continue to work and improve on with a monitoring schedule in place and having the safeguarding and reviewing team supporting in this matter.

Visitors continue to be seen as a critical friend, gathering feedback from other stakeholders such as children, parents and professionals to improve the young person's overall experience and to provide a report that is reflective of the life of the home.

Going forward the plan is to create opportunities to observe other Independent Visitors and visit other homes from neighbouring areas and share examples of good

practice with the aim of continuing to develop the Regulation 44 procedures and practice in Lincolnshire.

### **The voice of the child**

Across the service the homes are very good at promoting communication between staff and young people and involving them at all stages using different tools and approaches. Haven have examples of one young person who has been placed on a full time basis and the staff have been encouraged to take photos of the young person signing as there are particular signs which the staff do not understand. Management have suggested the photos can then be shared with the school and parents in an attempt to interpret and understand what has been said. Strut and Haven have also promoted family Christmas experiences for young people placed with them for full time care.

Beacon uses activity and planners using visual aids (PECS) that the children are able to recognise as they have been involved in developed the PECS (pictorial aids for communication). They are promoting training for staff and have a clear plan in place to develop this skill and to ensure the child's voice is reflected in written documentation. They have also undertaken work with all the young people to gain their wishes for a feature wall in their own bedrooms so it is reflective of their choice.

Within the secure unit the young people continue to inform the multi-disciplinary meeting through their own contribution forms and the Risk Manager enables them to identify their own themes and views which encompass a wide range of topics from summer activities to health issues to how they can develop gym and sporting equipment.

Strut consistently and routinely use a variety of alternative and preferred methods such as makaton, PECS and iPads. The staff have taken time to instruct the Visitor on methods and simple sign language to enable them to communicate directly with the young people. The young people at Strut House have had access to a wide range of activities and experiences throughout the summer holiday and there are photographic displays throughout the home demonstrating the children's wishes and feelings.

The voice of the child is extremely well represented in reports, particularly those prepared by Strut and Haven who are also routinely displaying quotes and photos of the young people.

Some homes have also been creative in developing spaces for children to reflect and talk to staff when necessary. Staff at Eastgate have promoted the use of the 'Thinking Swing' for young people to have a space to reflect and/or calm down. They also have access to the Theraplay space / quiet room for a breathing space. Haven have developed a sensory garden for the young people to have a calm and reflective space and also have the additional use of a summer house which is accessible to all the young people for sensory experiences during the daytime and night.

Northolme are very strong on advocating for the young people, including one young person being supported to make a complaint to the police (the young person directly stated to the Visitor "I felt like I had a voice"); and staff advocating on behalf of another young person to access appropriate educational support. This has resulted in a young person being able to access full time education and she is now attending daily whereas before her attendance and behaviour was extremely poor.

Within the secure unit, the young people have been confident and vocal in sharing their views with the Visitor and this has been strongly supported by the staff members and responded to favourably by the management team. This has been in relation to whole group issues as well as individual issues and concerns. There was evidence of follow through of actions and the young people clearly felt listened to.

Throughout the majority of the homes there is more evidence of "You said we did" boards and some of the outcomes are reflected within residents meetings. Most of the homes actively promote the compliments and complaints processes (raising day to day issues) and there is very good evidence of the process working and there being a timely response to the young person, particularly in the Secure Unit, Eastgate and Northolme where young people have raised a complaint and these have been effectively and robustly resolved. If there are worries that this is not utilised as effectively, the visitors continue to challenge and raise this as action points.

Social Pedagogy is delivered and recorded at different levels in the homes across the county, with some homes being more embedded. Northolme is particularly good with SP work and the SP Champion has delivered a session within the six day course presenting examples of practice within the home. Eastgate are also doing deep dive work to ensure recordings are of good quality and there is follow up work. Haven have now started the SP and Restorative Practice approach and this has featured within their team development day. The team have agreed plans of how to promote SP and RP in a complimentary fashion in terms of recording incidents and reports to inform care planning. Northolme already has established practice with regards to restorative incident reports and Strut are in the process of developing a restorative/reflective approach to recording incidents.

The Independent Advocacy service continue to attend all homes although there have been some delays in sharing reports at times due to staffing and capacity. The Independent Advocacy Service have been in the process of recruiting new advocates due to staff retirement and this has caused a delay between some visits and providing the reports however this is being monitored by the relevant Registered Managers. Nevertheless, the visit dates are recorded in home files although reports can take a little longer. The reports provided and feedback to management teams has been valuable.

Visitors have adopted a range of skills and activities to engage with the young people in the homes, including one to one discussions, group discussions, playing with young people and enjoying activities in order to gain their voice.

## **Quality of care**

The children within the homes continue to receive a good quality of care. There have been some significant challenges for some care homes regarding the on-going challenge of recruitment of staff at a variety of levels, from RCO1 to Homes Manager, however it is positive that 2 permanent Registered Managers have been recruited and are both in post. In some homes there is a bank of regular agency and relief workers who have had access to focussed training and support. This has enabled some homes to develop a consistent staff group where the young people have been able to form a rapport and the staff have had the opportunity to become well accustomed with the home routines. It has become clear to the Visitors that a stable staff team is an essential foundation for providing settled homes and quality care to the young people and this has proven to be quite a struggle for some of the home during this report period.

Staff and managers have ensured that they have been flexible in covering staffing vacancies, going the extra mile to ensure that young people's daily activities and routines aren't compromised. It has been positive to see the involvement of all staff within the home taking part in the care of young people.

Albion Street have been through a particularly challenging period due to a combination of issues also including the dynamics between the young people, staffing issues, the need for an established and skilled management team, and a few admissions. It is a credit to the staff that they have continued to present for work following a difficult shift.

There is good quality training being delivered and also access to a range of courses to aid the on-going development of staff including:

- recording skills training alongside staff from other children's home to develop skills in day to day recording requirements
- Therapeutic Crisis Intervention training is underway to ensure all staff are up to date with their training.
- Restorative Practice training is to be delivered in-house imminently.

There is also tailored training for specific homes such as healthy living or to meet an individual children's needs, such as a CAMHS Psychologist delivering training within a team meeting focusing on the impact of trauma on a child's development.

There has been positive use of Signs of Safety planned mapping exercises with staff members, some are routinely delivered within team meetings to reflect on individual young people's needs. The secure have benefited from one staff member being allocated to develop the key work sessions, particularly focusing on signs of safety and RP and this has made a marked improvement in ensuring quality and frequency of keywork sessions in the home.

All the homes are able to evidence multi-agency partnership working and there are routinely contributions from health, police, school, social care and other agencies, undertaken through scheduled monthly meetings and ad hoc communications. The Police and PCSO presence within the homes in a preventative manner is evident in the mainstream homes, building the trust between the young people and police and also the relationship with the staff and police. There is an openness to invite other professionals and agencies into the homes to meet the needs of the young people. Such examples are weekly meetings between Beacon and Sandon School; the introduction of a motorbike scheme at the secure unit with bikes donated by the police; Strut House providing a location for education to be delivered in a familiar space for two young people; the involvement of young inspectors. Beacon have used staff meetings and handover meetings to share information within the staff group whilst Strut have revised their handover sheet to ensure relevant and concise information is shared between shifts.

Home staff follow through with procedures and routinely contact 111, GP's, Pharmacies and specialist health providers where there have been health issues or concerns regarding medication. Medication discrepancies have been appropriately managed and used as an opportunity for effective individual and group learning to minimise the risk of reoccurrence. Young people are routinely taken to standard GP, dentist and optician appointments as well as specialist consultant appointments. There has been a drive on general healthy living across the homes and Northolme has benefited from a new kitchen with Eastgate and Albion Street to undergo renovations.

There is evidence that staff are attending EPEPs, EHCP reviews, sports days and parents evenings, they routinely engage with teaching staff regarding individual young people to ensure that their educational needs are being met. There is also evidence of staff advocating for the young person when their educational needs are not being met. There have been examples of young people having additional support from Positive Futures and mainstream schools being creative in their delivery of education and promoting attendance. Staff members have planned ahead during holiday periods to promote the transition from primary schools to secondary, or from establishment to establishment. Within the secure unit there has been the appointment of a new Head Teacher who has revised the approach to inducting new young people into the school, developing new and more effective ways of educating and promoting care staff and educational staff to work together to ensure a smooth transition between school and home within the unit.

The homes each offer a variety of activities for the young people to meet their needs and interests. Haven and Strut have a well-established routine of activities both in and outside the home which promote social inclusion and experiences. All activities are well risk assessed and even if there are incidents during the activity there is an emphasis on reflecting and reviewing the risk assessment to ensure the young person can still participate rather than withdraw the activity. The homes provide a good variety of activities and actively promote independence where they can and

encourage community participation, develop the young people's interests and positive social interactions with peers such as visiting friends after school for tea.

The young people are also enabled to go on extended trips within the UK or abroad and they have enjoyed a range of summer holidays including camping, adventure holidays in Northumberland, a girls trip to Cornwall, and overnight trips with siblings to Butlins. The secure unit have been building on community links, for example young people have been enjoying the regular input of an ex GB table tennis coach; one young person accessing a community based college; the planned introduction of the bike scheme; and an acknowledgement that this can be improved and built upon. Beacon staff continue to develop a system whereby all the children access activities outside as well as within the home providing them a varied experience. Haven and Strut promote social inclusivity and independence enabling young people to access community experiences such as going to the cinema and to local fairs.

Eastgate have now completed the homework room and this has been used for home tuition with one young person whilst he was awaiting a fulltime provision.

Beacon is awaiting the development of the outdoor space which is due to be completed now funding has been agreed.

Within Haven, the modernisation projects have been agreed for refurbishment of the sound and sensory room; a new front door entry system has been completed; improvements to the garden to include a fire evacuation cabin and swings are still in the planning stage; refurbishment of the Arjo bathroom is complete; and window inserts for one bedroom is complete.

There is a significant refurbishment underway at Albion Street which has been somewhat delayed in being completed. New doors have been recently installed and bedrooms have been re-decorated, re-furbished with new en-suite bathrooms and some new carpets. The new kitchen has not been completed at the time of writing this report. The Registered Manager acknowledges that this has been a huge task and has challenged the young people's daily routines.

The homes seek to ensure that the home environment is clean, well-kept and ultimately safe for the young people. The handyman role has been subject to a restructure whereby they now have a county wide remit so the homes have daily access to maintenance support according to their needs and this is now centrally managed by the manager at the secure unit.

Independent Visitors would make particular reference to the swift and supportive response from Beacon, Strut and Haven to the emergency admissions of young people arising from the suspension of a private children's home provider. These homes have provided exceptional levels of care to a number of young people and have been responsive to their needs in exceptional circumstances and the feedback from other professionals and families has been wholly positive and should be commended. Beacon has now increased capacity and now provide care to ten young people.

## **Social Pedagogy and Restorative Practice**

Social Pedagogy (SP) and Restorative Practice (RP) is evident within all of the homes to varying degrees, being on the visual display boards and individualised to the child within the home. Some homes, whilst they agree that SP and RP work needs to be promoted, are currently having to prioritise other pertinent factors and areas of recording. Work is being done, albeit informally in some homes, however it is not being consistently recorded in the most effective way. For new staff SP continues to be promoted through the induction process and consequently through continuing professional development. This has been a significant feature in Beacon who have had a large influx of permanent staff over recent months so training has been delivered throughout their induction periods.

Each home has identified champions that have responsibility for integrating SP and promoting practice although there has been some challenges where the lead has left the home. Across the board, staff have reported the training is very good though intense. This is now being embedded in homes via adhoc activities as well as organised events. SP is recorded on individual case files along with SP activity files, team meeting agendas and is subject to regular audits by senior staff within the home.

SP is used alongside restorative practice to reflect on daily activities and providing a structure for focussed work with the young person following an incident. This is still in its infancy in some homes however staff are sharing experiences and work examples between the homes to develop and embed good practice across the service. Its use is being aligned with the young person targets and care plans in order to embed this into the day to day interactions with staff and activities. Staff are reporting that this is complimenting their practice rather than being seen as a standalone piece of work and they are seeing the benefits of linking behaviours to feelings and reflecting on their contribution to dynamics and relationships. It is positive to see the enthusiasm of the champions within the homes, notably Strut, Eastgate, Northolme and Haven, and the way in which they are driving developments within and between the homes.

The SP ethos and practices have provided an outlet for a more structured and reflective practice within the staff teams although some homes are at quite an early stage of embedding practice. It is instrumental in supporting the development of deep and meaningful relationships between the staff members and the children/young people and a focused method to support the young people with emotional difficulties.

## **Challenges**

Visits are conducted on a monthly basis, there have been challenges in ensuring that the written reports are completed and fed back in a timely manner, this continues to be a focus for improvement for the visitors.

In respect of planned moves, there is good evidence of risk assessments and matching of children within the homes being undertaken and impact assessments being appropriately used in respect of decision making. This is essential to maintaining stability within the homes however there is some concern in relation to the impact of emergency placements.

The mix of young people and their individual needs has continued to present a real challenge for some of the homes over the course of the last 6 months. The need to accommodate some young people at short notice has created an additional complexity to the dynamics of the group and whereby particular young people have been challenging and their behaviour has impacted on the staff and young people already residing in the homes in particular at Albion Street. This has led at times to a chaotic living environment with physical damage to the home environment as well as a negative impact on the other children and injuries to staff. Staff have shown a resilience in responding to these issues.

Staffing of the children's homes remains one of the on-going challenges that is addressed through rolling recruitment and more targeted advertising.

### **Ofsted inspections**

All of the children's homes are subject to Ofsted inspection. Each home is subject to twice yearly inspections, ordinarily there will be a full inspection annually followed by an interim inspection approximately six months later.

The **Lincolnshire Secure Unit** had an Inspection on the 24 September 2019

Judgement at last inspection: Good

Date of last inspection: 15 January 2019

Enforcement action since last inspection: None

This home was judged good at the last full inspection.

At the interim inspection, Ofsted judges that it has sustained effectiveness.

**Albion Street** had an inspection on: 6 to 7 August 2019

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account: requires improvement to be good

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The children's home is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: 1 March 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: sustained effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

**The Beacon**, which provides care for children with special needs had an inspection on 27 to 28 August 2019.

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account: good

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 9 April 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

**Northolme** was subject to an inspection on the 05/12/18 to the 6/12/2018.

Overall experience and progress of the children and young people was outstanding.

How well children and young people are helped and protected was outstanding

The effectiveness of leaders and managers was outstanding.

**Haven Cottage**, which offers short term care to children with special needs, was last subject to a full inspection 3 and 4 September 2018

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people Outstanding

How well children and young people are helped and protected Outstanding

The effectiveness of leaders and managers Outstanding

The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standard of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly

improved outcomes and positive experience of the children and young people who need help, protection and care.

**Strut House**, a short term unit for children with special needs had an inspection on the 9 to 10 Oct 2018 and continue to be awarded an Outstanding grading.

**Eastgate**, was subject to an OFSTED Rating of the Home from the last inspection Outstanding: Inspection dates: 17 to 18 October 2018

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account outstanding

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people      Outstanding

Taking into account:

How well children and young people are helped and protected      Outstanding

The effectiveness of leaders and managers      Outstanding

The Children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standard of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly improve outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people who need help, protection and care.

## **Conclusion**

Overall the homes provide good if not in some instances exceptional levels of care for the young people in their homes. There is an ethos of reflective practice and approaches within the homes; they ensure that learning is shared across the team. The use of champions ensures that practice is continually updated and promoted rather than being lost.

Staff teams have been resilient and remained motivated even when staffing issues and management of young people have caused additional challenges. The recruitment process has been consistently used and staff have assisted between homes at times of need to ensure safe levels of care. Homes continue to promote positive practice and strive for positive outcomes for the young people in their care.

The staff and manager's commitment to providing good quality care to the young people in spite of the challenges is to be commended and is consistently evident across the service.

There is the enthusiasm to develop the role of the Independent Visitor through engagement with Ofsted and engaging at a regional and national level.

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