



**Open Report on behalf of Heather Sandy, Executive Director –
Children's Services**

Report to:	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
Date:	20 November 2020
Subject:	Partners in Practice Programme Update

Summary:

The report provides the Committee with an update on the Partners in Practice Programme in Lincolnshire.

Actions Required:

The Committee is invited to seek assurance regarding the progress and outcomes of the Partners in Practice Programme.

1. Background

Partners in Practice Overview

Partners in Practice (PiP) is a genuine partnership between local and central government by bringing the best practitioners and leaders in children's services to improve the system. This four year programme commenced on the 1 April 2016 with Lincolnshire joining in December 2016 and the programme ending on 31 March 2020.

The Partners in Practice are amongst the strongest local authorities in the country having achieved an outstanding or good Ofsted inspection. Through the programme they are:

- continuing to develop, test and evaluate innovation to build understanding of the conditions needed for excellent practice to flourish
- driving sector led improvement through peer support and challenge to local authorities who need to improve
- supporting Department for Education (DFE) to shape and test policy on wider programmes and reforms.

Within the Lincolnshire PiP programme sit six individual projects which align directly to two of the three fundamental pillars of DFE (practice and systems, and people and leadership). The projects are:

- Signs of Safety/Restorative Practice (SOS/RP).
- Early Help Review
- Future4Me (previously known as Risk Taking Behaviours)
- Caring2Learn
- Workforce Development
- Improvement Support

Progress to date:

Signs of Safety/Restorative Practice

Project aim

To create a Lincolnshire practice framework which underpins our vision and values and is strength based, solution focused and ensures that families are understood as a whole.

Project achievements:

- Created the practice advisor roles which have had a significant impact in supporting teams to drive and develop the SOS and RP practice framework.
- Developed and launched a single assessment and plan which incorporates the SOS framework (the child and family assessment and progress plan).
- Produced new policies and processes which are aligned to the SOS framework and rebuilt Mosaic workflows to support the workforce.
- Sustainability for SOS/RP plan has been completed and internal training programme has been developed. Funding for the Practice Advisors (PAs) has been found within the internal review of the quality and standards service.
- Passport to excellence practice in respect of future SOS/RP training has been completed and will consist of a one day introduction to practice in Lincolnshire, two day advanced SOS and then one day bespoke workshops including safety planning, RP and words and pictures. These will all be delivered internally by PAs and those staff who have completed the South Yorkshire teaching partnership train the trainers qualification.

This project is now closed as all existing functions have been sustained within existing budgets.

Early Help Review

Project Aim

To improve the interface between early help and social care as this was not flexible enough, did not lend itself to relationship based practice and continuity of relationships and trust for children and families.

Project Achievements

- Improved the experience that families receive through a consistent approach and maintenance of existing relationships with lead professionals.
- Redistributed resources across the county and the teams, including a boundary move.

- Created a central early help front door that is now aligned to the customer service centre.
- Reviewed our offer to parents to link with public health nursing, healthy minds and children's centres.

This project is now closed as all existing functions are sustainable within existing budgets.

Caring2Learn

Project Aim

To outline the way forward for an innovative countywide, inter-agency, research based approach to support the development of sustainable practice. This would enhance and develop an effective engagement between home, school and Children's Services which impacted directly on improved short and long term outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people.

Project Achievements

- 40 schools have now been accredited as part of the caring schools award.
- 22 fostering households.
- 3 of our children's homes have achieved learning home status.
- 200 schools, education and early years settings have received training and support.
- 200 foster carers and residential homes staff have received training and support.
- Caring2Learn team won the Children and Young People Now 'Children in Care' award for 2019 recognised as the local authority who had improved outcomes for looked after children or young people, whether in residential care, foster care or other types of placement.

Next Steps

- To continue with developing and delivering Caring2Learn for a further year up to 31 March 2021. The extension of the project will enable Lincolnshire to assess the longer term impact on educational achievement, emotional wellbeing, those children achieving above expected progress and reduction in exclusions of vulnerable children.
- Develop extended support and guidance for parents and guardians of previously looked after children.
- Support North Lincolnshire virtual school in embedding Caring2Learn in schools across this local authority.
- Explore joint working on teams focussed on early intervention, such as early help and early years.

Future4Me (F4M)

Project Aim

To create and develop the Future4Me team, to progress our aspirations to prioritise reducing criminalisation, working effectively with individuals vulnerable to

exploitation or extra familiar risks and provide a robust framework to wherever possible divert young people away from statutory criminal justice and social care systems.

Project Achievements

- Reduced the number of first time entrants into the justice system with the creation and development of the Joint Diversionary Panel. The Joint Diversionary Panel has resulted in a reduction of more than 70% of the number of first time entrants within the youth justice system in Lincolnshire.
- One of three local authorities chosen to pilot the alternative to AssetPlus.
- Created and developed the Boston schools project.
- Introduced a consultation clinic for case formulations ensuring all young people entering Future4Me receive a clinical case formulation to support trajectory and interventions. In 2019, 700 were delivered.
- Dedicated youth housing officer employed to work closely with the corporate parent/leaving care service.
- Trauma Informed Practices training for staff, for case formulation and a strong health offer.
- Child exploitation and missing (a strategic multi-agency child exploitation group) to include oversight of return interviews. We have established new working practices around missing and exploitation which has included the launch of a new child exploitation screening tool. There is excellent collaboration through the co-ordinators being co-located within the police vulnerable persons unit. We have seen an overall reduction in the number of declined interviews and an increase in timeliness of meeting the 72 hour timescale.

Next Steps

- Continue working on the alternative to AssetPlus pilot.
- Development on key areas.
- Confirm the profile of need.
- Reviewing the 'entry points' for the Service.
- Youth homelessness prevention.
- Establishing the foundations of trauma informed practices.
- Review the effectiveness of the extended service.
- Internal evaluation of the project to determine impacts and outcomes and present sustainability plan post 2021.
- Given the substantial lead in time to design and develop the service, the DFE has awarded the project a further year's funding during 2020/21. The project will focus mainly on ensuring the right cohort for the F4M model is reached, fidelity to the trauma informed practices, the youth homeless prevention model and evaluate and measure impact of the project.

Workforce Development

Project Aim

To bring together a range of work streams that supports the children's workforce to include research, learn and development, recruitment and retention and teaching partnership.

Project Achievements

- Robust succession planning, coupled with effective staff development to enable internal promotion opportunities.
- Reduction in vacancy rates of staff turnover, increasing staff retention.
- Reduction in agency costs and more appropriate planned use of agency staff to cover short term vacancies.
- Confident and competent workforce who are able to effectively support children and families who they are key worker for.
- Revised recruitment process that is candidate focussed, responsive and timely.
- More adaptable workforce, enabling staff to move roles across the system, e.g. early help to residential care.
- Growing practice skills to support the changing needs of children, young people and families, linked to practice advisors work within quality and standards.
- One front door for all Children's Services training through the learning and development team.
- 67 social work staff are now NAAS accredited (National Assessment and Accreditation Scheme).

Next Steps

- One front door for all Children's Services training through the learning and development team.
- To support all social work staff to achieve NAAS accreditation.
- Review the mandatory training requirements and what staff have, at what level and develop an improved pathway for Children's Services staff to reflect roles and responsibilities.
- Recruitment and retention, teaching partnership, learning and development, research and workforce development have transitioned into our main business activities, with a majority sitting within the quality and standards service area.

This project is now closed and all functions sustained within existing budgets and are delivered by the Quality and Standards Service.

Improvement Support

Project Aim

To support sector led improvement through our experience as an intervention partner with Rotherham and Northampton by building the vision, values and culture of the organisation through robust self-assessment and acceptance of external feedback.

Project Achievements

- Since the start of PiP in December 2016 to 31 March 2020, Lincolnshire has provided in total 1272 support days to 37 local authorities.

Next Steps

- We are currently involved as the official improvement partner to Northamptonshire County Council until 30 September. The results of their recent Ofsted and action plan will determine future support requirements, subject to DfE funding approval. This improvement support is funded separately from within the DFE.

Evaluation

The programme and the evaluation are funded by the Department for Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme (Innovation Programme hereafter). The evaluation was commissioned by the DFE, and undertaken by Ecorys: an independent research organisation. The final report has not yet been published by the DFE, however below is a summary of the findings. Publication is expected to be later in the year.

This evaluation of the Lincolnshire PiP programme has found largely encouraging findings. Families' and staff experiences have been fundamentally positive, and there have been a number of outcomes achieved for children, young people and families, Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) and partner staff, and Lincolnshire's Children's Services as a service.

A Counterfactual Impact Evaluation (CIE) of the Future4Me project found that the reoffending rate among the young people it supported was 11 percentage points lower than the comparison group, who did not receive the project's services. This was a statistically significant finding when compared to a comparator group and offers a high standard of evidence. A CIE of the early help offer did not find a statistically significant impact on referrals to Children's Services in general or referrals that require no further action, although it did suggest the programme had an initial stabilising effect on referrals. This possible effect could be monitored and further explored in future with longer-term data to see if the stabilising effect continues and/or if the programme results in a statistically significant, detectable impact in the long-run.

Lincolnshire's Children's Services has a history of high-quality delivery (achieving 'Good' or 'Outstanding' ratings by Ofsted), so an overarching question for the evaluation has been to assess the extent to which the PiP programme added value to the type of service that would have been delivered otherwise. Evidence from this evaluation has uncovered areas of added value including those in relation to: embedding the Signs of Safety framework into the local authority's systems and processes; increasing the use of relationship-based practice; extending training to a wider range of professionals across the county; valuing foster carers as professionals and lessening the risk of placement breakdown in particular; as well as the impact of Future4Me as demonstrated by the CIE. The main risk to further progress based on qualitative findings appeared to be staff vacancies and the resulting impact these have on staff capacity. However, quantitatively, Lincolnshire fares better than statistical neighbours and national averages on these counts.

Staff survey responses and stakeholder interviews highlighted a number of critical success factors of the PiP programme, including consultation with staff and

families, utilising evidence-based approaches (such as trauma-informed practice advocated by Dr Karen Treisman), high-quality training and effective technology and processes such as supervisions.

Although outside of the scope of this evaluation, it is a reflection of the wider potential of the Caring2Learn that Lincolnshire has worked with other local authorities to develop their own practice. For example, at the end of March 2020, the Caring Schools Award has been adopted by 24 schools and education settings in North Lincolnshire.

A culture of critical inquiry and reflective practice (Baginsky et al, 2017), which recognises that progress is rarely uniform, linear or constant, will be crucial for the PiP programme and its lessons to continue to be embedded across Lincolnshire and potentially beyond. Research into the seven enablers of improvement in children's services summarises this as follows:

‘A key finding of our research has been that the improvement activities in which local areas are engaged were consistent, continuous and cumulative. Local areas in the good-to-great stage of their journey had not stopped doing what had enabled them to improve from poor to fair. Instead, they had continued, embedded and built upon these activities...we found that improvement had ceased to be a discrete project and was part of ‘core business.’ (Bryant et al, 2016)

In this spirit, Lincolnshire’s Children’s Services has a track record in engaging in internal and external research, including staff surveys and academic studies. This can be enhanced by uncovering gaps in their quantitative evidence – for example by enhancing traditional ‘monitoring’ measures with wider wellbeing or other evaluative measures: findings from which can drive further progress and can also be contextualised and understood with qualitative evidence.

Funding

In total Lincolnshire has received a £6,563,803k funding for the Partners in Practice programme from December 2016 to March 2020. For complete transparency and management oversight, this funding has been carefully monitored by the DFE on a quarterly basis and internally by finance on a monthly one to ensure each year's funding allocation is spent as forecast in the original project bid. This has been a requirement of the DFE grant conditions to comply with the treasury policies.

At the invitation of the DFE, Lincolnshire submitted a further bid in January 2020, to the DFE for PiP funding to continue to develop and test Caring2Learn, Future4Me and sector led Improvement. This was successful and it has been confirmed that Lincolnshire will receive PiP funding of £1,207,908 for 2020/21. This will be carefully monitored using the existing process and governance procedures already established for the programme.

2. Conclusion

The Lincolnshire PiP programme added value compared with previous delivery by embedding the Signs of Safety framework, which is a strengths-based approach to children's social care casework and providing training for a wide range of professionals to support effective implementation. Added value was also achieved by the impact of the Caring2Learn project on valuing foster carers as professionals and lessening the risk of placement breakdown.

Children, young people and families reported positive experiences of the PiP related services they received. Professionals generally cited engaging with families in a more meaningful way than before PiP, spending time building relationships and trust with families. Key aspects of the PiP approach have been the holistic support provided by multi-agency and multi-skilled teams ensuring this was done with, not 'done to', the family by listening to them and utilising their strengths. The roles of the child and family assessment, family network meetings and the involvement of wider networks of family and friends supported these outcomes for children, young people and families.

Furthermore, Lincolnshire recognises and values the importance of sector led improvement and is committed to continuing as an improvement partner for local authorities in need of support during their improvement journey. We have a long proven track record in sector led improvement work with Rotherham and Northampton, and with 32 other local authorities across the time of the PiP Programme.

Monies have been agreed by the Department for Education for 2020/21, and the amount and regularity of payments has been confirmed. The money will be transferred via a Section 31 grant.

3. Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

The equality and impact assessment was completed at the start of the programme.

Individual risks and issues logs have been developed for each project. All risks are monitored through robust governance arrangements.

4. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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