



## **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL 17 SEPTEMBER 2020**

### **PRESENT: COUNCILLOR D BRAILSFORD (CHAIRMAN)**

**Lincolnshire County Council:** Councillors Clio Perraton-Williams (Vice-Chairman), A G Hagues, S R Parkin, R H Trollope-Bellew and M A Whittington

**Added Members:** Polly Coombes (Foster Carer)

Officers in attendance:-

Michelle Andrews (Head of Early Years), Kieran Barnes (Virtual School Head Teacher), Laura Bonner (Team Manager, Children's (Safeguarding)), Rachel Freeman (Interim Head of Service, Children's (Safeguarding)), John Harris (Head of Regulated Services - Fostering), Nick Harrison (Democratic Services Officer), Anne Johnson (Adoption Team Manager), Andrew Morris (Corporate Parenting Manager), Krysta Parsons (Caring to Learn Project Manager), Daniel Steel (Scrutiny Officer) and Sam White (Practice Advisor, Quality and Standards)

### 14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor R L Foulkes and Elizabeth Bunney (Lincolnshire Community Health Services).

### 15 DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTEREST

Councillor M A Whittington wished it to be noted that his son was in receipt of support from Barnardo's. The Panel passed on their best wishes to his son who had just enrolled at Riseholme College.

### 16 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 JULY 2020

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 July 2020 be signed by the Chairman.

### 17 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR AND LEAD OFFICER

There were no announcements.

18 PRESENTATION OF THE REVISED PATHWAY PLAN

The Panel considered a report from the Corporate Parenting Manager, that provided an update on a new Pathway Plan which members were requested to review and submit comments on.

The report included the Pathway Assessment and the previous version for comparison purposes. The Assessment would be completed with a young person just before they turned 16 years old. The Assessment at 16 was a regulatory requirement and was intended to be an opportunity for all involved to pause and plan, take stock of the past, and prepare the young person for the next two years of their life ready for adulthood and independence. The Assessment was the bedrock of a good Pathway Plan and all subsequent reviews.

The Pathway Plan was broken down into two parts. The first part was about the young person, their voice, and their wishes. The second part sought to capture an on-going assessment and analysis of needs across certain domains such as accommodation, education, finances, personal wellbeing etc. The Plan covered the remaining regulatory requirements whilst also seeking to be concise and remain more engaging for young people. An example of how the Plan would look if the young person was an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child (UASC) was also included in the report.

The Quality and Standards Team were currently in the process of auditing the Pathway Plan and assessment documentation, and the initial findings had been positive. Feedback from staff and young people was that the new document was more flexible and easier to complete. Fewer young people were resistant to engage in the process of Pathway Planning, and staff believed that the document provided a better framework for discussions to help capture peoples wishes, feelings and actions. Further auditing would take place over the next six months to see if further alterations or training was required.

Members were provided the opportunity to ask questions to officers present in relation to information contained within the report and some of the points raised during discussion included the following:

- It was thought that work undertaken on the revised report was an example of where the scrutiny function had been important and had made a difference.
- Work was ongoing to ensure the application of the processes and training was consistent across the Service.
- A pilot to make translated documents available was being planned.
- The vast majority of those who had experience of the old documentation had expressed a preference for the new document.
- There would not be any increase in boxes to be completed in respect of an *Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child* as it was expected that experienced officers would capture the narrative within the existing document. This was welcomed by the Panel.

- Reassessments were possible within the scope of the Plan. A review of what constituted a need to reassess was underway. The example of a significant lifestyle change was given as a possible trigger for reassessment and reference was made to the need to determine how that could be better defined.

## RESOLVED

1. That the report and comments be noted;
2. The Pathway Plan, the process and associated documentation be endorsed.

19 PARTNERS IN PRACTICE PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Chairman informed the Panel that the Assistant Director Children's Services (Safeguarding), who had been due to present the report, was unable to attend the meeting. He suggested, and it was agreed, that should there be any questions from the Panel on the report then they should be emailed to the Head of Service and they would, along with any responses, be included in the minutes of the meeting.

The report provided an update on the Partners in Practice Programme in Lincolnshire. Partners in Practice (PIP) was a genuine partnership between local and central government bringing the best practitioners and leaders in children's services together to improve the system. The four year programme had commenced on the 1 April 2016, with Lincolnshire joining in December 2016 and the programme ending at the end of 2020. The programme had been focussed on; 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 needed to improve; supporting the Department for Education (DFE) to shape and test policy on wider programmes and reforms. The report outlined progress to date on the six individual projects which sat within the Lincolnshire PIP programme which were: signs of safety/restorative practice; early help review; future4Me (previously known as Risk Taking Behaviours); Caring2Learn; workforce development and improvement support.

## RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted;
2. Any questions on the report from the Panel be emailed to the Head of Service and, along with any responses, be included in the minutes of the meeting.

20 FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Panel received a report from the Children's Services Manager, Regulated (North and Fostering), which highlighted the work of the Fostering Service for the year 2019/2020, in accordance with the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services 2011 and Fostering National Minimum Standards. The report detailed the role of the Service, the number of foster carers, the numbers who had ceased foster caring, foster care recruitment and retention activities and advertising,

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the role of Placement Support Workers, and the work and workload of the Foster Panel.

The Panel were provided the opportunity to ask questions to officers present in relation to information contained within the report and some of the points raised during discussion included the following:

- The Panel acknowledged that recruitment of foster carers had been challenging and the response to adverts had been patchy. It was noted that there had been a recent increase in interest and the Service would be reviewing how it recruited and retained carers from a broader range of the population. Also under review would be the drop-out rates and reasons for these. The conversion rate from expressions of interest to becoming a foster parent was an issue being addressed. The timeframe from an initial expression of interest to fostering was about six months and this had not unduly been affected by Covid-19.
- The Council had recently invested in a retention payment in recognition of the dedication of carers in supporting the most vulnerable young people with complex needs coupled with investment in Caring2Learn and bespoke support packages. These measures had been well received. Carers had particularly responded well to the use of on line resources which had been increasingly used since Covid-19.
- The loss of existing carers continued to be of concern and reflected the demographics of the foster carer population.
- The reasons for ceasing to be a carer were discussed and often involved relationship breakdown and major life interventions such as health issues.
- Lincolnshire County Council offered a foster friendly package of support to employees who wanted to become foster carers and this model would be promoted to other Lincolnshire businesses to encourage recruitment. The Panel suggested that the package should be also promoted to NHS organisations.
- The Panel recognised that there was a need for more carers but were in agreement that standards should not be lowered to achieve this. Many children had complex needs and potential carers should continue to be made aware of the reality of the task they would be undertaking and ensure that it was the right fit for their family. It was important that those enquiring about the Service should be motivated for the right reasons. It was noted that during economic downturns foster caring allowances became more attractive to some. The Panel welcomed the fact that training had been introduced earlier in the recruitment process to help reduce issues further down the line or after take up.
- Members were re assured that data on the current demand for the service was reviewed regularly and the impact of Covid-19 on the Service, foster families, children in care and, in particular, those who required most support was being monitored and issues addressed. As part of the recruitment process the Panel were reassured that despite the impact of Covid-19, at least one home visit was undertaken.

- The Panel acknowledged that staff were working in challenging conditions and there had been no discernible decrease in the continuity and standards of service.

## RESOLVED

That the report be accepted as an accurate overview of the Fostering Service for 2019/2020 and the comments as outlined above be noted.

## 21 ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Panel received a report from the Children's Services Manager Regulated (South and Adoption), which highlighted the work of the Adoption Service in accordance with the requirements of the Care Standards National Minimum Standards 2003, 2011, 2014 and the Adoption and Children's Act 2002). The report contained a range of information about the Adoption Agency in relation to performance indicators and measuring good outcomes; the work of the Adoption Panel and various regulations relating to the Act and Adoption Support; progress on development goals identified in the 2018/2019 Annual Report.

The Panel were provided the opportunity to ask questions to officers present in relation to information contained within the report and some of the points raised during discussion included the following:

- The Panel welcomed that the average time between gaining authority to place and achieving a match was 141 days, which was significantly better than the all England average.
- It was noted that there had been a higher number of adopters and contested adoptions in the period the report covered and that more support had been provided via the adoption support fund.
- The Council had been commissioned by Rutland County Council to provide adoption services to them.
- An update on the regionalisation of adoption services was requested for a future meeting.

## RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted and approved;
2. That an update report on the regionalisation of adoption services be submitted to a future meeting of the Panel.

## 22 CARING2LEARN UPDATE

The Panel received a comprehensive report from the Project Manager, which provided an update on the implementation and impact of the Caring2Learn project for the last twelve months. The Caring2Learn project had been in existence since January 2018, and aimed to improve a wide range of outcomes for children, both at school and in the home. The project had brought together carers, education settings

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and children's services teams working with children in care and developed the training and support they received.

It was noted that the Caring2Learn Award which included a range of good practice frameworks for Learning Homes and Caring Schools made it possible to identify, celebrate and drive good practice for Lincolnshire children and young people in care. A Hub Support Network for foster and residential carers, designated teachers in schools, wider education and children's services staff brought everyone together to support each other, offer advice, share good practice, information and problem solve.

It was particularly noted that due to Covid-19 and the lockdown had meant it had not been possible to carry out the final assessments for students in the Caring2read Study. However, lockdown had demonstrated that the principles of Caring2Learn and the structures that were in place were extremely effective in supporting children in the home and in school. Through a Facebook group, which had approximately 560 members, information and good practice had been distributed and shared quickly to offer immediate, flexible and personal support to those in need. By adapting to online platforms, the service had continued to promote the highest standards of excellent practice through high quality training. Workshops had been delivered to over 200 schools during the lockdown period. The use of virtual training would continue to be offered in the future as both capacity and interest had grown.

Following comments from the Panel it was agreed that making the Care2 Learn offer available to adopters, including virtual training, would be considered and a report on a breakdown of school attendance, following the recent re opening of schools, would be submitted to a future meeting.

**RESOLVED**

That the report and work of the Caring2Learn project be endorsed.

**23 QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR CHILDREN IN CARE**

The Panel received a report from the Assistant Director Children Services (Safeguarding), which provided key performance information for Quarter 1 2020/21 that was relevant to the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

*(Councillors R H Trollope-Bellew and A G Hagues gave their apologies for the remainder of the meeting)*

The report detailed a number of targets that were relevant to Looked after Children used by Children's Service and the ones below were highlighted:

- Fostering/adoption of Looked After Children aged 10 to 16 year olds – This performance remained under target. The vast majority of children looked after within this age group were placed in foster care settings but this had been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic as placement options had been reduced as a result of foster carers shielding and unable to take additional placements.

- Percentage of Looked after Children in the same placement for at least two years - Performance was at 68.9% at year end and continued to gradually improve.
- Percentage of Looked after Children with up to date routine immunisations - Throughout the majority of this quarter there had been significant restriction and changes to the way in which health services were delivered to the public, and more specifically the children who were looked after.
- Percentage of Looked after children with an up to date dental check - Performance in respect of dental checks had been lower than the target for the last three consecutive quarters. This had been largely due to older children resisting appointments with the dentist. The recent lockdown measures implemented for Covid-19, had also resulted in dentists being closed for business and this had further impacted performance.
- Stability of placements of Looked after Children: Number of moves - The target was challenging and slipped under target last year although performance was generally better than other East Midland authorities where an average of 10% of Looked after Children experienced three placement moves in a year.

The Panel noted that the hospitality and tourism industries, which were traditional entry points to employment by young people, had been adversely affected by Covid-19 and this situation could be further exacerbated by any economic slowdown in the future. Officers were encouraged to continue to work with partners in economic development and tourism where possible to promote care leaver apprenticeships.

#### RESOLVED

That the report and comments made above be noted.

#### 24 CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report which enabled the Panel to comment on the content of its work programme for the coming year to ensure that scrutiny activity was focussed where it could be of greatest benefit.

During the meeting a number of items had been suggested for future agendas and would be added to the programme. These included an update report on the regionalisation of adoption services and a report on a breakdown of school attendance following the recent re opening of schools.

#### RESOLVED

That the Work Programme be approved and include the additional items as outlined above.

The meeting closed at 11.58 am

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