

**REPORT FOR THE  
INDEPENDENT VISTING SERVICE  
April 2020 - 30 September 2020**

**Dawn Oldroyd, Cheryl Govier and  
Richard Stone**

**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 and there has been the re-introduction of the recommendations section to ensure there is clarity in prioritising areas for immediate action.

## **Covid 19 Pandemic March 2020**

In Lincolnshire, visits to homes were temporarily suspended on the 18<sup>th</sup> March until further guidance was received to safely support face to face visits due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore there were no visits conducted until May 2020 when agreement was made for the visits to be conducted virtually. Meetings were conducted with the Regulation 44 Independent Visitors and there was close consultation with the Registered Managers and senior management team to devise an arrangement to resume a visit regime that would ensure that inspections were undertaken in a format which promoted safe working practices within government guidelines.

The May visits were deemed as a light touch in preparation for resuming full visits in June 2020 and therefore focused on Covid contingency arrangements and the way in which homes had responded to the Covid pandemic. The homes managers were keen to resume the Independent Visits and demonstrate the measures they had implemented alongside government guidance and they provided transparent feedback about the challenges the pandemic had caused and the impact on young people, staff and service alike. Indeed Haven had a proposed change to their Statement of Purpose as a contingency plan in anticipation of a change in service demand as a consequence of the pandemic.

Visits between June and August 2020 inclusive were undertaken remotely with the support of video link technology to enable tours of the homes to take place and to facilitate face to face discussions and interviews (albeit remotely) between Registered Managers, staff and young people. It was also agreed for evidence to be provided to the Independent Visitors electronically during this period which entailed a commitment from the homes management team to provide a wealth of information in advance of the visits however this has generally proven to be a successful exercise.

Face to face inspection visits have resumed in the home from September 2020 with the support of robust visiting arrangements, risk assessments and the use of personal protective equipment (PPE). This has been proven to be well organised with robust preparation and Covid checks being undertaken in advance of visits. The homes visits guidance are considered to be fit for purpose and Independent Visitors have been provided with designated areas to conduct the inspection visits.

### **The Independent Visitor**

From September 2019, Regulation 44 visits continued to be undertaken by two Independent Visitors Dawn Oldroyd and Eska Verleg who shared the visiting duties to the 7 homes and the two supported living schemes in Grantham and more recently Gainsborough providing accommodation for young people aged 16-18 for a period of up to six months. Both accommodations are inspected under the Regulation 44 process however this is 'a lighter touch' exercise every 4 months.

Cheryl Govier, Independent Chair, became part of the Regulation 44 team in December 2019 when she started her induction and conducted shadow visits and commenced the full remit of the role in May 2020. Richard Stone has subsequently been successfully appointed as a permanent Independent Chair and commenced the Independent Visitor role in July 2020 shadowing Eska Verleg and has commenced the full remit of the role in September 2020. Eska conducted a one off visit to Beacon in September 2020 as Dawn Oldroyd had a period of sick leave however Eska has now withdrawn from the Independent Visitor role.

Since undertaking the visits virtually the Independent Visitors have attended staff handovers via videolink, conducted video interviews with staff and young people and participated in virtual tours of the home via video link. The virtual tours have provided varying degrees of success in terms of connectivity and quality of calls however these methods have provided an opportunity to conduct a visual inspection of the home albeit in limited terms. On the whole there has been a good range of evidence provided by the homes and they have been responsive in providing additional information when requested in a timely manner.

The Independent Visitors have continued to maintain positive working relationships with care home managers, staff and young people. Both of the new Independent Visitors report they have had positive experiences throughout their induction and commencing full inspection visits and they are developing effective relationships with the staff.

The Visitors speak with key stakeholders including the young people, parents, social workers, health and education partners and other relevant individuals to gain a holistic appraisal of the homes.

There has been no need to implement the dispute resolution procedure over the last 6 months however there has been positive communication between the Regulation 44 team and regulated services to resolve arrangements for delivering the inspections during the Covid pandemic. There has been regular communication between senior management and this has enabled a revised approach to be agreed to resume safe visits.

Two of the independent Visitors have attended national Regulation 44 forums via online video conferencing and this has enabled them to gain an understanding of practice across the country and to access training opportunities to further develop the service within Lincolnshire. Richard Stone has applied to join a national forum which offers events and training opportunities and the ability to network and share good practice.

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

All of the homes have had to adapt their processes and practice to ensure that young people's voices have been heard throughout the Covid lockdown and to promote contact between children and their families and professional support network. This has resulted in an increased use of alternative electronic resources to facilitate visits and telephone contact and the implementation of risk assessments.

Northolme managed the initial lockdown period extremely well and maintained regular contact with families and key people in their lives. Staff facilitated video and telephone based family time and have provided young people with a Covid activity pack (Compass Buzz) to increase their awareness and understanding of the pandemic and health matters in order to reduce their anxieties about the global pandemic. Risk assessments were put in place and young people were enabled to have outdoor family time at local parks and this has now progressed to community visits and meals out with family.

Eastgate has a younger age range (10+) and have also completed direct work with the young people about Covid to address any potential anxieties and the Independent Visitor has observed that the young people had a very clear understanding of what they need to do in order to keep themselves safe. One young person has even been observed to have given social distancing advice to staff which demonstrated how embedded this approach is for the young people to keep safe.

Haven staff have developed a board within the home "Staying in is the New Going Out" which has showcased the work that the staff have completed with the young people to meet their needs during lockdown and photo evidence has demonstrated their voice. Young people were encouraged to devise their wish list of activities and this has enabled staff to adapt the home environment to provide opportunities such as a soft play area in the summer house and making a youth club in the other summer house which was decorated with input from the children.

Strut House had a young person move in as a looked after child and this resulted in the way in which the service was being delivered to some of the young people changing, some switched to day care provision as opposed to overnight stays. The young people have been provided with a range of activities to suit their needs and the children's voices continue to be perfectly captured throughout the young people's reports and care planning. There is also a wealth of evidence of feedback from families who advocate on behalf of their child. The home also continue to make very good use of alternative communication devices and non-verbal cues to seek young people's wishes and feelings.

The secure unit have faced a significant impact on the young people in terms of supporting them during the Covid lockdown when criminal proceedings have been significantly delayed. The young people have all completed Covid worksheets and they have been provided with activity packs to maintain positive emotional and physical health during the lockdown. They have continued to have access to independent advocates, they've increased contact with families via telephone, videolink and more recently face to face with PPE. There have been some confirmed cases of Covid within the home and the young people have all reported feeling safe and supported. Some young people have reported that they felt cared for and gave very positive feedback about their experiences of having to socially isolate for 14 days during this period.

Beacon had a change of Registered Manager just prior to the national lockdown however there have been lots of positive developments within the home whereby a large of number of young people are preparing for independence and have therefore been very much involved in developing their skills. These young people have had a bespoke package offered to them to promote their social development. There is also increased use of social pedagogy and evidencing direct work around the home which further shares their wishes and feelings. The supporting manager is currently working towards involving the young people in council forums to ensure they are involved in future decision making.

A new registered home was opened in response to the Covid Crisis, Wickenby, to provide additional residential care for young people which offered a placement for one child. This young person had some complex and challenging behaviours but the staff supported him in preparation for move on to longer term specialist care.

The young people at Albion Street have reported they had positive experiences of activities during the summer holidays and are enjoying having increased contact with their families now that lockdown restrictions are reducing. Ofsted identified a number of concerns during an assurance visit which are in the process of being resolved and during the most recent visit the young people are reporting that they feel listened to, things are changing, they have more privacy and the home feels more homely.

The young people across all the homes have shared that staff have really worked hard to enable them to participate in activities during the summer holidays in spite of Covid restrictions and this has shone out from all of the homes.

Most of the homes continue to promote display boards that celebrate the voice of the child through 'Voice of the child' and 'You said we did' creative displays. There is also an increased use of photographs to evidence the young people's input and some of the homes are using newsletters to

share information. Beacon have devised a weekly newsletter from child to parent to share their updates and Northolme have a Covid lockdown diary as a keepsake of their pandemic experience.

The voice of the child is extremely well represented in reports across the service. Albion Street continues to be a work in progress in terms of advocacy, recording and engagement at reviews. Most homes have a robust process in place for young people to raise issues, complaints and compliments although they all have access to independent advocacy which has been remotely provided during the Covid period. The Independent Advocacy service have maintained telephone contact with all the homes however direct visits will now resume in most homes.

Social Pedagogy continues to develop across the homes and is delivered and recorded to different extents with some homes practice being more embedded.

### **Quality of care**

The children within the homes continue to receive a good, and in some homes excellent, quality of care. There have been some significant challenges for some care homes regarding the on-going recruitment of staff at a variety of levels, from RCO1 to Homes Manager.

Albion Street is currently being managed by the substantive Eastgate Registered Manager with the Assistant Manager from Eastgate now acting up to the manager role. As has already been referenced, the young people within the home have reported that there have been improvements to both the living environment and their experiences within the home over recent weeks and remedial action is now in place to address some of the concerns identified by Ofsted. Practice within the home is showing signs of continued development and the introduction of clear processes to improve standards of care.

The Beacon has also experienced a change in Registered Manager over recent months whereby the Northolme Manager has been temporarily supporting the home and a new Registered Manager has now been appointed. Staff have reported a marked improvement in morale and increased confidence in their day to day practice and there has been lots of evidence of improvements to the aesthetic presentation of the home but also an increase in induction and training and the regularity and quality of supervision thus improving practice standards within the home.

Strut House has struggled over the past months with continued changes across the staff team and also the extended placement of a looked after child within the home for a period of months during the lockdown period. The management team, with the help of Dave Clarke and senior management, and the wider staff group have done exceptionally well, showed great resilience and worked very hard to ensure continued quality in delivering the service to the children accessing their short breaks. It still continues to be a priority to secure a permanent management team as there is no longer an Assistant Manager in post, there continues to be some vacancies so there is a continued emphasis on prioritising recruitment.

In some homes there is still 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.

Staff and managers have been flexible in covering staffing vacancies, going the extra mile to ensure that young people's daily activities and routines aren't compromised. Staff have also been redeployed from around other parts of the council in order to support the homes throughout the lockdown period and exit interviews for these staff has been very positive and both the redeployed staff themselves and home staff have benefited greatly from this experience in sharing skills and knowledge.

There is good quality training being delivered and also access to a range of courses to aid the ongoing development of staff and a refreshed approach to the induction of new staff as there had been some gaps identified in some homes. Managers have been very supportive of ongoing staff development with one example of a staff member from Eastgate being re-deployed to the new home, Wickenby, to develop her skillset and she has now successfully achieved a level 2 post.

The homes are sharing good practice and have positive communication channels and have been proactive in sharing knowledge and skills in response to issues arising within specific homes. This has ranged from the use of PPE to managing challenging behaviours and working with staff in respect of completing robust risk assessments.

Eastgate are currently implementing a new approach, TEAM (Together Everybody Achieves More) which is planned to be launched with the young people in October half term which builds on their strengths or areas of expertise such as learning a new language or musical instrument, adventure helping others, getting fit and improving our world and this is then incorporated into daily life and activities with the young people.

There are positive examples of bespoke packages of care and interventions being provided to young people to meet their complex needs. Eastgate have been instrumental in ensuring one young person has been offered the opportunity to engage in a specialist therapeutic intervention to address some long standing difficulties. This has been a long process and has required a partnership approach to secure the funding and commissioning of this specialist service. Strut have also recently supported a very complex and challenging looked after young person and there has been an intensive period of working with a range of health professionals to secure and assessment and specialist residential placement.

Beacon have gone to great lengths to ensure that the most vulnerable children within the home have been able to effectively shield during the Covid pandemic and this has required children to move rooms and for the living environments to be reconfigured and routines amended to facilitate this. Those children have now successfully come out of shielding and have had a positive experience of the lockdown.

All the homes have continued to participate in multi-agency partnership working, albeit remotely, with health, police, school, social care and other agencies, with continued monthly meetings and ad hoc communications. The homes have adapted extremely well to the new ways of working.

Access to universal health services has been impacted by Covid in the context of services closing down due to health risks however young people have had access to 111, GP's, Pharmacies and specialist health providers where there have been health issues or concerns regarding medication. Medication discrepancies have generally been appropriately managed and where there has been a spike in incidents in Beacon these have been responded to through re-training, evidencing competency through supervision and sharing issues as part of team meeting agendas.

There has been a drive on general healthy living in the secure unit as some young people have raised issue with portion size, the cook has been closely involved with the young people in increasing their awareness of healthy lifestyles and food choices.

Staff continue to attend EHCP and epep meetings and have responded well to supporting the children and young people who have had to remain at home during the lockdown period. The homes have provided a range of learning opportunities for the young people according to their individual needs. There has been a range of experiences of education prior to the summer holidays whereby some young people have been in school whilst others have used creative activities to promote learning. Strut house continued to facilitate the looked after child receiving his home tuition.

Each of the homes have ensured the young people have had access to a range of activities regardless of the limitation of lockdown. There has been a varied approach to in-house craft activities, train trips, visits to the beach, overnight caravan stays. The introduction of an activities lead at Beacon has had hugely positive results with staff reporting the children have done more this summer than in the last 5 years which is exceptional.

The refurbishment at Albion Street is complete with the exception of new carpets which are due to be fitted imminently. The home is now reported to be aesthetically more homely and modern.

Northolme is in the process of decorating the lounge and the young people have been involved in creating the colour scheme and a sensory chill out room is being created.

Strut House have now resumed providing short breaks to all young people following the looked after child moving on. The homes has had all of the repairs completed and is now fully functioning with full access to all areas for all young people. There has been very positive feedback from parents that service provision has resumed.

### **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. New staff that join the teams continue to access the training at hand and also engage with support within the teams through the home champions to ensure the practice is embedded and they grow in confidence and skill. SP is used alongside RP to reflect on daily activities and providing a structure for focussed work with the young person following an incident.

This is developing in each home and it is fair to say that the homes are at different stages of development in terms of implementing restorative practice. Its use is being aligned with the young persons 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.

There is now a much clearer link between SP and responses to incidents and a more restorative approach in resolving and managing these incidents.

## **Challenges**

Covid has clearly been the biggest challenge in terms of requiring a more flexible approach of staff; minimising children's' access to family time/education/face to face contacts, managing Covid outbreaks, implementing new health and safety procedures. The Homes Managers have done an exceptional job in responding to the ever changing advice and approaches and in supporting both staff and young people through this process. The management team and staff have responded swiftly and robustly to this challenge and it is a credit to them that they have been able to minimise the disruption and anxieties amongst some of our most traumatised children and young people. They have creatively approached the task of developing Covid support packs and ensuring the smooth running of the home during unprecedented times.

The impact of Covid has also coincided with a change in the management teams in some homes which will also have been a challenge for staff and manager alike however the feedback from staff and young people has on the whole been very positive and there are signs of real development within these homes.

Undertaking a Regulation 44 inspection via remote virtual visits has also been a challenge and has required a new way of working from both the Independent Visitors and home staff alike.

## **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 4 to 5th February 2020

**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      good

Outcomes in education and related learning activities      good

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

## **Albion Street**

**Date of Last Inspection:** 10<sup>th</sup> September 2020

Judgement at last inspection: Requires improvement to be good

Enforcement action since last inspection: Compliance Notice and Action Plan

**The Beacon**, which provides care for children with special needs, had an inspection on 27 to 28th 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: 9th April 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

**Northolme** was subject to an inspection on the 12 and 13th February 2020

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

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

Date of last inspection: 5th December 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

**Haven Cottage**, which offers short term care to children with special needs, was last subject to a full inspection.

Inspection dates: 6 to 7th January 2020

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account: 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 standards of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people who need help protection and care.

Date of last inspection: 3rd September 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

**Strut House**, a short term unit for children with special needs had an inspection on the 6 & 7th January 2020 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: 27 to 28th January 2020

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account: 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 standards of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people who need help, protection and care.

Date of last inspection: 17th October 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

### **Conclusion**

Overall the homes continue to provide good, if not in some instances exceptional, levels of care for the young people in their homes. The Registered Managers have responded robustly to Covid in very exceptional and unprecedented circumstances to ensure the physical and emotional safety of welfare of the children in their care with positive feedback of their experiences.

Some of the homes continue to face challenges in respect of staffing however the re-deployment of staff in response to the Covid crisis and the hard work and goodwill of the staff within the homes has enabled them to continue to function and care for the young people and to support them through the lengthy lockdown and restrictions.

There are ongoing developments across the residential estate in respect of social pedagogy and restorative practice and there is evidence of sharing of skills across practitioners. Staff have been responsive to these upskilling opportunities and confidence continues to grow within the homes.

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