



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

Report to:	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
Date:	05 March 2021
Subject:	Children in Care Transformation Programme Update

Summary:

This report provides the Committee members with an update on the Children in Care Transformation Programme.

Actions Required:

The Committee is invited to seek assurance regarding the purpose and progress of the Children in Care Transformation Programme.

1. Background

Children in Care (CIC) Transformation Programme

We have a Children's Services system which is working well and a Children in Care Service which is outstanding although there is more we can do to deliver excellent outcomes for children and families, particularly taking into account the impact of Covid-19 and the national lockdowns. More specifically, the pandemic has brought about a pressure upon the placement market place and availability and cost of external placements. Furthermore, the availability of in house foster placements has reduced as carers self-isolate or enquiries are not progressed.

In response to the impact of the pandemic upon Children's Services, the Transformation Programme has been developed to provide additional resource and capacity to respond to these challenges. The ambition of the Children's Services CIC Transformation Programme is to ensure that we are providing the right help to the right children at the right time and for the right duration.

Since 2019, the number of children in care in England per 10,000 population has increased by 65, up from 64 in 2018. Lincolnshire's increased from 43 per 10,000 in 2019/20 to 45.9 as of October 2020. The total number of children in care has increased since April 2020, and as at January 2021 it is sitting at 675. Due to the first, second and third lockdown restrictions we have seen an increased use of out of county residential or independent fostering placements (IFA) as a number of in-house foster carers were unable to offer placements to new children in care

because of existing vulnerabilities in the household, self-isolations and shielding. Furthermore, the ages of children in external provision has decreased with some children as young as 8 years requiring externally commissioned placements. The proportion of Lincolnshire children in care in independent non-maintained provision, residential or IFA placements as at 31 March 2020 is now over 10%; 12 months ago it was below 6.5%. This has and will place considerable pressure upon the Council's budget. Whilst our numbers of children in care and numbers of children placed with external providers compares very favourably in comparison with other local authorities, we need to respond in a proactive way to ensure that wherever safe and possible, children can remain living with their parents or family. If children do need care provided by the local authority, we also need to ensure that they receive the right care at the right time, for the right duration and more importantly within their own communities. Therefore the Children in Care Transformation Programme is both innovative and ambitious, while embracing our key strategic goals, which are:

- To reduce the need for statutory intervention in families lives, by providing the right help to the right children at the right time and for the right duration.
- To support families to come to their own solutions by focusing upon building networks which they have in place.
- To improve outcomes for our Children and Young People, by providing care locally within Lincolnshire rather than care at a distance to keep Children and Young People within their own communities where they can be close to their networks.

Using the principles of the successful Partners in Practice Programme and the Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) Transformation Programme, the CIC Transformation Programme is managed through clear and robust governance arrangements, including the Transformation Governance Board and the Corporate Transformation Programme. Through stakeholder and staff engagement and co-production, the six following workstreams for the Programme have been identified and agreed by the Executive Directorate Leadership Team (DLT) and the Transformation Board:

- Early Help Strategy
- Practice Excellence
- Valuing Care Approach
- Re Think Fostering
- Residential Capital
- Residential Reform

Early Help Strategy Workstream

It is really important that we all identify what we need to be doing across every part of the child's journey to prevent escalation of need and improve outcomes. Therefore the CIC Transformation Programme will also focus upon early intervention and support. Our Early Help offer to children and families in Lincolnshire is strong, but the Transformation Programme provides a timely

opportunity to refresh and develop an Early Help Strategy that is fully-reflective of our strengths and priorities; and owned by both Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) and our partners. Through a series of engagement workshops and surveys with internal staff and partners, this work stream will gain a collective response to shaping the priorities of the Early Help Strategy and agreement of a small number of meaningful outcome based measures which can be used to track the impact of the Early Help system.

Progress to date:

- Project brief completed.
- Consultation time line developed.
- Consultation workbook devised to shape priorities.
- DLT agreement to brief and consultation.
- Presentation to Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) Board. Nominations out for Multi Agency Steering Group members.
- Workshop sessions for Children's Services Team Managers on 17 December 2020.
- Partners and Family engagement survey live 11 – 31 January 2021.
- Work packages scoped - Meaningful Measures (Development of a small number of outcome based targets linked to key corporate and partner objectives) and Relationships (Effective step downs, collaborative relationships between social care front door, Team Around the Child coordinators and localities).

Practice Excellence Workstream

The past nine months has seen a change in the way practitioners work with children and families. Services and localities have put a lot of effort into adapting and creating ways of continuing to keep children safe despite all of the pandemic restrictions. To achieve practice excellence, we must aspire to deliver demonstrable and sustained improved outcomes in the lives of Lincolnshire children and young people. This will be delivered through the Practice Excellence workstream to ensure our Signs of Safety (SoS) Practice Framework and models of working are consistently applied across the workforce and learning from the Covid-19 pandemic is captured.

Progress to date:

- Practice Advisors (PA) have been identified to support this work stream.
- 12 Family Finding Boot Camp training places have been secured and key staff have been identified to attend this training in January and March 2021. This group of staff will champion the use of the Family Finding approach across Children's Services.
- Workshops being developed for refresh of SoS Framework for March/April 2021.
- Practice Expectation in draft form - to be available for the refresh dates.
- SoS Service Plans from localities being received to enable development of SoS refresh.
- Bespoke workforce training undertaken – Child Exploitation and Missing, and Youth Homelessness.

- Language audit scope meeting set with PA's, Participation, and Young Inspectors; this will inform practice leader session development and support overall children in care language/culture change.
- Digital development – Lunchtime learning booked, all recorded and to be used as resources for locality teams and partner agencies.
- Lincolnshire to be involved in research with Professor Eileen Munro and Andrew Turnell, Co-Creator of Signs of Safety, to explore the impact of Covid-19 on family networks and subsequent outcomes for children and families.

Valuing Care Approach Workstream

The Transformation Programme currently has a unique opportunity to work with Impower to test the use of a new approach called Valuing Care to explain, record and track needs and outcomes for children in care on an individual and cohort level. This is so we fully understand and communicate their stories, including their strengths and aspirations as well as the needs and risks. Valuing Care is an approach which profiles the needs and strengths of the young person, what is currently in place to support that need and identifies any additional support or intervention the child would benefit from. This is ideally done in a multi-agency setting and in consultation with the child.

How it can support the Transformation Programme

On an individual child level:

- Helps shape a holistic, nuanced picture of the child and create a shared language with professionals about their needs and goals.
- Used at different points in a child's journey to understand changes over time.
- It is focused upon progress and outcomes.
- The tool can be embedded into the existing case management system Mosaic.

At a population-level:

- Valuing Care helps us get a picture of our overall needs locally.
- We can see the most prevalent needs across the children in care population and within different groups.
- We can use analysis like this to help us understand the picture of needs and challenge assumptions about where needs are highest and lowest. This will help inform:
 - Matching and placement finding
 - Commissioning
 - Foster carer development and recruitment

During phase 1 of the implementation plan, we have introduced the Valuing Care approach to 75 practitioners and service leads; encouraging feedback has been

gained on using Valuing Care to shape the Children's Services Sufficiency Strategy and an ambition to embed into practice. The Valuing Care approach was tested using a sample of 149 children from our children in care cohort, resulting in a needs and cost analysis for this sample. This has enabled the service to identify key opportunities to use Valuing Care to improve outcomes and cost, with consideration of plans for some children to step down from high cost external residential placements to foster care and in some cases to explore the reunification with home.

During phase 2 of the implementation plan, the focus will be upon:

- Test pilot with 50 young people at the edge of care.
- Preparation of Mosaic to embed the tool within the system's workflows.
- Develop reporting and trajectory frameworks.
- Utilise the on-going needs and cost analysis to inform key planning and decision making.
- Embed Valuing Care within the commissioning process.

Re Think Fostering Workstream

We have a strong in-house Fostering Service, however through diagnostic workshops the priority below and subsequent challenges have been identified:

Priority:

- To promote fostering as a partnership, working with foster carers every step of the journey by providing the right support, training and resources when needed. This will be delivered through reviewing our current foster carer offer, the development of a fee paid scheme and the evaluation of the Caring2Learn project (C2L).

Challenges:

- Covid-19 has impacted upon the availability of foster carers.
- We need to maximise every initial enquiry to ensure we continue to capitalise upon our conversion rates.
- We need to promote our unique selling points to entice potential foster carers.
- We need to re-explore the need for a bespoke fee paid carer scheme.
- We need to ensure the C2L project success can be sustained within existing Children's Services budgets.
- We want all of our carers to be trauma informed.

Residential Capital and Residential Reform Workstreams

In 2019, Capital funding was agreed for the development of two new children's homes over four years. This project was slightly delayed due to the pandemic; however the Residential Capital Workstream and the Residential Reform Workstream have now been brought under the scope of the Transformation Board.

The Transformation Programme vision is to provide additional capacity within the residential estate to provide high quality therapeutic placements in-house, as it is anticipated that these placements will allow for children, particularly young children, to have their needs met better with a view to future step down to foster care. Currently we are heavily reliant on the commissioned placement to indicate whether or not it would be in the interests of a child to move on from a high care home. As an authority, having this in-house provision will ensure that there is not a necessity to commission the current level of high cost placements out of county. The aim is that by 2023, two new residential homes will be established in-house, providing an additional eight residential placements.

The Residential Capital Workstream will focus upon the creation of two or three new operational mainstream children's homes that are Ofsted registered (either through the purchase of a property or build on a LCC existing site; both opportunities are being explored). This will increase capacity and enable children to be placed back in county in an internal provision that has been designed to provide high quality therapeutic placements to meet their needs. These homes will be smaller units designed to meet both the younger cohort and older cohort. The homes will be based upon a trauma recovery model, with wrap around multi-agency support.

The Residential Reform Workstream will focus upon creating the vision, statement of purpose and recruitment of staff, whilst also managing the Ofsted registrations of the new homes and supporting the identification of those children placed in external provision that may be able to transition to these new homes.

2. Conclusion

Each individual workstream identified is governed by the Executive Directorate Leadership Team and Transformation Board. Financial implications will be considered within each work stream when evaluating the options and recommended action for decision. The Programme is acutely aware of the current financial challenges facing Children's social care budgets through increased children in care and increased placement costs.

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 are being captured and developed by the Programme Office Transformation Manager. All risks are monitored through robust governance arrangements via the Transformation Board.

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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