

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

Councillors J R Hicks, J D Hough, P O'Connor and L Wootten

External Members:

Jean Burbidge (Lincolnshire Community Health Services), Polly Coombes (Foster Carer), Samantha Edwards (Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust), Mr T Normandale (National Youth Advocacy Service)

Councillors S R Dodds, N J Smith and S M Tweedale attended the meeting as observers

Officers/invited guests in attendance: Theresa Buhryn (Performance Development and Reviewing Officer), Dave Clarke (Unit Principal, Lincolnshire Secure Unit), Sheridan Dodsworth (Head of Service for Children with Disabilities), John Harris (Joint Head of Service for Regulated Services), Colin Hopkirk (Participation Officer), Tracy Johnson (Scrutiny Officer), Tara Jones (Head of Service for Regulated Services), Kerry Mitchell (Leaving Care Manager, Barnardo's), Jinny Niven (Customer Relations and Complaints Manager) and Rachel Wilson (Democratic Services Officer)

17. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A G Hagues and R J Hunter-Clarke.

Apologies for absence were also received from Stuart Carlton (Assistant Director Children's Services), Marilyn Graham-Williams (Foster Carer), Cassie Hanley-Ball (Acting Chair, V4C The Looked After Children Council), Janice Spencer (Assistant Director Children's Services) and Beth Tibbles-Hammond (Outgoing Chair, V4C The Looked After Children Council)

18. DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest at this point in the meeting.

19. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18 JULY 2013

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 July 2013 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

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20. VOICES FOR CHOICES (V4C) EXECUTIVE GROUP MINUTES (THE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN COUNCIL) HELD ON 18 JUNE AND 23 JULY 2013

Consideration was given to the minutes of the Voices for Choices (V4C) Executive meetings held on 18 June and 23 July 2013.

During consideration of the minutes, the following points were noted:-

- Good progress was being made on reviewing the 'Coming into Care' forms;
- Social worker training had now been linked in with the University of Lincoln;
- A series of short films was being made as part of the App development, and filming was due to start soon;
- The date for the Big Conversation had now been rearranged, and an agenda would be circulated shortly;
- Dates for future meetings of the V4C had been circulated by the Scrutiny Officer and would be held at the Youth Centre in Horncastle.

It was reported that Beth Tibbles-Hammond had now left the V4C as she had moved to Sheffield to start a university course. It was agreed that Colin Hopkirk should write to her on behalf of the Corporate Parenting Panel to thank her for her contribution and send her best wishes for the future.

**RESOLVED**

1. That the minutes from the Voices for Choices Executive meetings held on 18 June and 23 July 2013 be noted;
2. That a letter be sent on behalf of the Corporate Parenting Panel to Beth Tibbles-Hammond thanking her for her contribution.

21. V4C ANNUAL REPORT

Consideration was given to a report which provided the Corporate Parenting Panel with an annual report on membership activity progress on the V4C Executive and its sub-groups. The report described progress made since 2012 and showed a positive picture of progress and achievement for V4C Executive and sub-groups, and identified the main challenges for the year ahead. It was co-authored by the Participation Officer and the acting Chair of the V4C Executive Group.

The Panel was guided through the report by the Participation Officer, and some of the points raised during discussion of the Annual Report included the following:

- There was a need to inform young people about what it meant to be 'Looked After' in order to reduce the numbers of 16-17 year olds who were homeless;
- The numbers of young people engaging with the Service was increasing as membership of the sub-groups had grown, approximately 40 young people attended the Big Conversation and 137 attended the FAB Awards;
- The Participation Officer agreed to provide statistics on participation rates at the next meeting;
- The Service should be able to reach a lot more young people through the web based app which was being developed. This would be reported on at the next meeting;

- It was commented that this was a very impressive summary of the activities which had taken place over the year;
- It was possible that in coming years there would be a significantly reduced budget for the FAB awards and so there would be a need to look at different ways in which this could still be held. The Panel was informed that the DMT had invested significantly in these awards as well the Big Conversation, and Heads of Service would be looking at their own budgets to see if they had any budget that could be contributed to ensure that these events would continue;
- The V4C gave added value as it allowed children to move forward and develop;
- The continuation of this service needed to be a priority, although it may be delivered slightly differently, but the Panel considered it important that it should continue.

#### RESOLVED

That the Annual Report be approved.

#### 22. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN ANNUAL REPORT

The Panel received a report which provided information in relation to the work of the Looked After Service for the year 2012/13. The Annual Report provided a written summary of the service including relevant performance data, achievements and areas for development.

It was reported that as at 31 March 2013, there were 583 Looked After Children in Lincolnshire, which was an increase of 16% on the previous year. This significant increase in the number of looked after children had resulted in budget pressures across the service including placements, Kinship arrangements and placements for young people leaving care. Neglect was one of the biggest factors in children becoming looked after.

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

- Next year this would be a joint report with public health;
- The control of the use of Facebook was becoming a significant issue for Looked After Children, as well as carers;
- There were e-learning modules around internet safety which could be accessed by foster carers;
- Potential for disruptions in foster carer placements, such as marriage breakdowns or serious illness should be issues which were picked up by social workers;
- Instead of training for issues such as Facebook, it was suggested that it could be more helpful if there was a mechanism whereby good practice could be shared with foster carers;
- It was thought that proposals to take away housing benefit from people under the age of 25 would have an impact on those young people who were leaving care, as they had to be housed until they were 21. It was suggested that this was something which needed to be discussed in more detail at the next meeting.

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RESOLVED

1. That the report be accepted as an overview of the Looked After Service;
2. That a report be brought to the next meeting on the impact from the changes to housing benefit for young people and how this would be addressed.

23. SUITABLE ACCOMMODATION FOR CARE LEAVERS

Consideration was given to a report which highlighted the current financial pressures resulting from the provision of supported accommodation for young people aged over 18 and additional information regarding the circumstances of young people in such placements and highlighted indicators of future need. It was noted that the outcomes were higher for those young people who were in family type accommodation.

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

- Some of the districts were very engaged with Barnardo's to help prevent care leavers from becoming 'intentionally homeless';
- Some care leavers were being housed in bed & breakfasts by the districts, but this was considered to be unsuitable accommodation;
- This issue was being worked on by the Homeless Strategy Group, who were also working with Public Health to get some funding to enable some of the support costs to be paid. Some young people needed support but did not need to be 'Looked After';
- There was a lot of proactive work being done at a local level;
- There would be an update on the progress of the Accommodation Strategy Action Plan at a later date.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

24. COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS RECEIVED FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The Corporate Parenting Panel received a report which presented information on the Compliments, Comments and Complaints received from Looked After Children for the period 1 January 2013 to 30 June 2013.

It was reported that 1 compliment, 0 comments and 2 complaints had been received during this six month period.

It was noted that one of the complaints received related to an historic issue, and since then policies and procedures had changed significantly. This was being dealt with as a Stage 2 complaint, and was still being investigated. It would be reported on in more detail at the next meeting.

RESOLVED

That the compliments, comments and complaints received for Looked After Children be noted.

25. HALF YEARLY REPORT OF THE REGULATION 33 SERVICE

Consideration was given to a report which presented the half yearly update on the Regulation 33 Service which covered the five months from April to August 2013. It was noted that the picture with regard to residential care in Lincolnshire was positive. All residential homes had been judged by Ofsted as good or outstanding.

Some of the points highlighted during discussion of the report included the following:-

- It was reported that there was a lot of positive activity with the young people engaging in lots of activities;
- Of the children who went missing, there were two who were absconding together. However, these figures had now reduced;
- One of the young people at Albion Street was now doing voluntary work;
- All of the young people had key workers;
- It was clarified that the complaint relating to Strut House, was not actually a complaint but an employment investigation;
- It was requested that more detail be included in the reports regarding how well things were going as it felt the report was just presenting facts and not interpreting them;
- It was suggested that visiting members could add their own words to the report, to describe how they felt the visit went.

RESOLVED

That the report and comments made be noted.

26. FOSTERING REPORT QUARTER 1

The Corporate Parenting Panel received a report which outlined the activity in the fostering service during Quarter One and was presented in line with regulatory requirements.

It was reported that 21 new applications had been received during this quarter and there had been an increase of 10 additional foster places which had become available. The Service continued to work with the Youth Offending Team.

It was acknowledged that there had been an issue with the recruitment and retention of foster carers, and work was on-going on how the Service could better engage with people who had expressed an interest in becoming a foster carer. It was noted that the response to initial enquiries was not as good as it could be. It was thought this was due to the same team being responsible for recruitment and support, and it had been suggested that this could be improved by having dedicated teams for recruitment and support. However, overall it was thought that this was a good news report.

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It was suggested that future quarterly reports could be circulated by email to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

RESOLVED

That the report be approved.

29. CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME 2014

The Corporate Parenting Panel was provided with the opportunity to discuss and agree its work programme for 2014. The dates for future meetings in 2014 were also proposed.

RESOLVED

1. That the work programme for 2014 be agreed;
2. That the proposed meeting dates for 2014 be agreed.

The meeting closed at 1.00pm.

DRAFT