



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

Report to:	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
Date:	03 September 2021
Subject:	Children in Care Transformation Programme Update

Summary:

This report provides the Committee members with an update of 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 10k population has increased to 65, up from 64 in 2018. Lincolnshire's increased from 43 per 10k in 2019/20 to 45.9 as of October 2020. The total number of children in care for Lincolnshire has increased since April 2020 and as at the writing of this report in July 2021 stands at 691.

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 seven years requiring externally commissioned placements.

Whilst we have seen an increase of confidence in foster carers coming back on line for placements since being vaccinated, 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 continue to 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 is managed through clear and robust governance arrangements. This includes the Transformation Governance Board and the Corporate Transformation Programme. Through stakeholder, staff engagement and co-production, the originally identified six workstreams for the programme were agreed by the Executive Directorate Leadership Team (DLT) and the Transformation Board. It was agreed due to the strong links and interdependencies that Strategic Placement Planning would form part of the Valuing Care Approach, as shown below:



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.
- Through a process of consultation and collaboration with families, partner agencies and Children services staff, we have produced the refreshed Early Help Strategy and developed multi agency Governance arrangements.
- Children, families and partner agency surveys December 2020 to February 2021.
- Children's Services Team Manager (CSTM) workshops February 2021.
- Multi agency Early Help Steering Group established March 2021.
- Draft strategy circulated to CSTM, Lincolnshire Learning Partnership Board (LLPB) and Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) steering group for feedback March to April 2021. Presented to DLT in April 2021.
- Strategy approved at Executive DLT 12 May 2021. Final approval by the LSCP Strategic Management Group (SMG) June 2021.
- Provisional Strategy launch date November 2021; launch plan being created.

The Early Help Strategy for 2021 - 2023 is attached at Appendix A.

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) continue to support this work stream.
- Family Finding and Restorative Practice Champions have been identified to support practitioners in refresher training. The newly defined Champions model supports the rollout. July/August 2021 will see all the Champions receive refresher training in Family Findings and Restorative Practice.
- Workshops being developed for refresh of the SoS Framework for July/August/September 2021.
- Practice Expectation draft now agreed and being transferred to digital format and will be available for the September refresh re-launch.
- Language audit has now concluded and findings shared with Practice Leads to disseminate to all front line practitioners. Feedback also scheduled to young people involved in the audit.
- Digital development – Lunchtime learning, podcasts, webinars are being developed. SharePoint being developed for access all area for resources.
- Emotional Wellbeing Trauma pathway has been developed and rollout will be in 2021/22.
- Produced the Caring Promise to our Children in Care.

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. Valuing Care is a new approach 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

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 transition home.

Phase 2 of the implementation plan will focus upon:

- April 2021 - Implemented the Valuing Care approach across all Children in Care.
- May 2021 – September 2021 - Piloting Valuing Care at Edge of Care and Foster Care reviews/Foster Carer assessments.
- Piloting within transfer (Step Out) to Team Around the Child (TAC).
- Introduced Independent Fostering Agency/In House matching events using the tool to profile children's needs and strengths.
- September 2021 - Review of the Children in Care Valuing Care workflows in Mosaic.
- Evaluate the early implementation within Children in Care processes.
- 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.
- Refreshed the Out of County (OOC) Placement Meeting, to create Placement Management Meeting and Tracker, in order to robustly monitor OOC spend and the trajectories for returning children and young people to in house placements or transition home.

Re Think Fostering Workstream

Although we have a strong in house Fostering Service, the diagnostic workshops identified the priority below and subsequent challenges:

- 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).

What we know:

- 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 ensure the C2L project success can be sustained within existing Children's Services budgets.
- We want all of our carers to be trauma informed.

Progress to Date

- Review of No Further Action (NFA) for fostering enquiries and Foster Carer Survey Response Data to inform Core Offer development.
- Review Caring2Learn Foster Carer feedback.
- Development of existing web platforms to ensure Lincolnshire's Fostering Service is in the top three searches on the internet.
- Review of Initial Enquiry questions and phrasing.
- Review of Initial expressions of interest questions and phrasing.
- All training currently offered has been identified and collated to identify any gaps.
- C2L evaluation and sustainability planning agreed by DLT, and C2L has been incorporated into Business as Usual (BAU) following the end of the Partners in Practice Programme.
- Tiered support approach and a one hub approach for foster carers.
- Scoping of Psychological support to carers, with the additional employment of two NHS Band 6 Children in Care Link Workers leading to -
 - Improved wellbeing.
 - Increased understanding and confidence of trauma and how to support children and young people within their care.
 - Improved stability of placements.

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 this Residential Capital workstream and the Residential Reform workstream have now been brought under the scope of the Transformation Board. The Transformation Programme's 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 a local 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.

Progress to Date

£1.5m Capital funding has been agreed over three years for the development of two new Children's homes. Potential 50% match funding is available through the new Department for Education (DfE) Children's Homes Capital Programme. Following an information event with the DfE, Lincolnshire will be applying for 50% match funding for two projects. The closing date for applications is 15 October 2021.

Following investigation of various solutions there are now three options being progressed through feasibility and design stages:

1. Lincoln property, hopefully with an early 2022 completion of works and opening of first home in July 2022 (subject to costs and democratic decision in November 2021). Currently at Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Stage 4 for detailed design to prepare for going out to tender. Planning application has been submitted.

2. New Build on an East Lindsey site could be open in Summer 2023 (subject to cost and democratic approval). Currently at RIBA Stage 2. This project is dependent on additional capital being secured through the bid to the DfE as it is not deliverable within the available £1.5m, including the need for an additional home.
3. Economic regeneration property in South Kesteven. Currently at RIBA Stage 1. Structural surveys are taking place on an existing property to determine if this is an economically viable option for a second home, if we are unable to progress with the preferred East Lindsey new build proposal.

2. Conclusion

Each individual workstream identified is governed by the Executive Directorate Leadership Team and Transformation Board. Financial implications will be considered within each workstream 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. The Residential Capital decision report is due to be submitted through the Capital appraisal process in November 2021.

3. Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

The equality 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. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Early Help Strategy 2021-2023

5. 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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