

Report for the

Independent Visiting Service

May 2021 – October 2021

Cheryl Govier, Kim Murray and Rachael Powis

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. The scope of this report covers the period from May 2021 (when the last report was submitted) to October 2021.

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 remains the inclusion of the recommendations section to ensure there is clarity in prioritising areas for immediate action where these are identified during visits.

Covid 19 Pandemic

Visits between April 2021 and October 2021 inclusive were undertaken in person where this has been possible. There have been some instances where in person visits have not been possible due to self-isolation and COVID contact within some homes, where an in-person visit would potentially compromise the safety and wellbeing of the young people and staff members. This is evidenced within individual reports. In these instances, Regulation 44 Officers have been able to use technology such as video to view the homes, meet with children and staff, attending handovers etc. However virtual visits have been avoided wherever possible with the Independent Visitors being flexible and re scheduling visits after isolation periods in instances where this has been possible within the calendar month to

ensure compliance against the monthly visiting schedule. Since the last report there have not been any visits undertaken outside of the due timescales.

The homes continue to operate robust and stringent guidelines to ensure that all visits are safe. COVID booking forms are completed by the Independent Visitor along with a lateral flow test and sent to the home prior to any visits which ask a set of questions about the Independent Visitors COVID status, their contact with others and personal details to aid the Governments Test and Trace service. The booking forms are retained by the homes for a period to aid any potential Contact and Trace Service contact, after which time they are destroyed on the basis that these contain personal and not business contact details for visitors. Upon arrival at the home the questions are asked again, and the Independent Visitors temperature is taken safely at distance and recorded prior to them being physically allowed on the premises.

Independent Visitors frequently sanitise their hands throughout their visits. Face masks are no longer a government requirement, and some homes no longer enforce these being worn but provide staff the choice to wear masks should they wish. Other homes have continued to enforce a mandatory requirement to wear masks when moving around the home. In these homes masks can be removed when stationary within the buildings and only at times when safe social distance can be maintained. In the homes that provide care for young people with additional needs and underlying health conditions, masks are always mandatory and staff members also wear these for additional protection.

The homes have closely followed the Governments lock down restrictions and road map to ease these and there has been evidence within the homes that young people have been fully supported to understand these, through regular young people's meetings, group and key working sessions and safety plans for those young people who are able to exercise their independence and spend time in the community on their own.

As the restrictions have eased the homes have been able to further open to visitors that are significant to the young people, always following the same level of safety precautions. In person visits between the young people and their families has developed further, for example the Beacon has now resumed family time being completed in the home, while previously this was being done in the community.

Sadly, despite all the protective measures in place, some homes across the county have experienced COVID cases. For example, Haven and Northholme had positive cases in August, which at the time the overall numbers of Covid cases in Lincolnshire was on the rise. Despite this only two young people tested positive in Northholme who managed the situation very well preventing the spread of the virus. Haven made the decision after two young people tested positive to close the home for four days, this quick and effective thinking prevented the spread of the virus to both staff and young people. Other homes have experienced individual cases in staff and young people.

Positively, these have all been managed effectively and in a timely manner. Managers have worked closely with Public Health and senior managers. This has involved timely risk assessments, strategic planning and mass testing within the homes. Mandatory face mask wearing has been introduced at these times alongside PPE and intense cleaning has been established to further reduce the risk of infection. Many of the regulation 44 reports

highlight that the young people said that they felt well supported and cared for during this difficult time for them.

In line with the Governments current plans, those young people who attend secondary school have been supported to access twice weekly lateral flow tests. Young people who wish to have the Covid vaccination have been supported in doing this and Covid boosters for staff members is being offered and fully supported. Following the government guidance and ending of the lockdown, all the homes have been keen and pro-active in supporting the young people accessing the community, from general walks and visits to the shops to regular activities and fun days out.

The Independent Visitor

From April 2021, Regulation 44 visits continued to be undertaken by three Independent Visitors Dawn Oldroyd, Cheryl Govier and Richard Stone. Both Dawn Oldroyd and Richard Stone have slowly transitioned out of the role over the past six months being replaced by Kim Murray and Rachael Powis. Kim Murray and Rachael Powis were able to complete some shadowing opportunities prior to completing solo visits, with Kim starting in April 2021 and Rachael in July 2021. The three regulation visitors continue to share the visiting duties to the 7 homes and the two supported living schemes in Grantham and Gainsborough which provide accommodation for young people aged 16-18 for a period of up to nine months. Both accommodations are inspected under the Regulation 44 process however this is 'a lighter touch' exercise every 4 months. Whilst this is not mandatory, the Local Authority have taken the positive step to commit to this as part of their quality assurance process.

The Independent Visitors have continued to maintain positive working relationships with care home managers, staff, and young people.

The Independent Visitors continue to develop relationships with the new homes managers that have been appointed since the last report was completed.

Since April 2021 there have been several changes to the management of the homes. The Beacon Homes Manager is now registered. The Manager from Eastgate was an interim manager and is now the manager waiting to be registered. Albion Street currently have an interim manager from Northholme, and Northholme have an interim manager. Haven currently has adverts out for both their registered manager and assistant manager. An RCO 3 was also successful in gaining the Assistant Manager position at Rowston and Denton. There has been further movement in the assistant manager positions and from this peer mentoring has been completed between the homes. For example, the new assistant manager at Albion Street peer mentoring /shadowing the new assistant manager at Eastgate.

The managers have continued to maintain positive communication and support across the homes. With regular management groups, and peer audits where two managers are going into other homes to complete audits. In addition, following Albion Street's Ofsted inspection several of the other homes provided training, mentoring and advice to support them in resolving some of the issues identified.

The Independent 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 since the last report was completed, 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, with the introduction of the new residential lead, which has continued to support the regulation 44 visits and supported communication.

The voice of the child

All the homes have had to adapt their processes and practice to ensure that young people's voices have been heard throughout Covid 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.

Since the easing of lockdown, the Independent Advocate visits again started to resume face to face visits. In June the advocacy service advised they no longer intended on completing physical reports for the homes, which was challenged by the home managers. Following this challenge, the advocacy service confirmed in September they would resume the completing of reports. These would be generalised reports of the young people's voices but anything specific from an individual child will be raised verbally, and they intended to back date all missing reports.

The homes continue to offer the young people a regular young people's meeting each month or 'Chill and Chat'. These meetings are used as an opportunity for the young people to become involved and have a say in how the home is run and for discussions around the important things that affect them. This has been used effectively to involve them in matters such as arranging activities; safety issues in the home such as COVID and encouraging them to become involved in the redecoration of their home, often choosing colour schemes and furnishings as examples. At the Beacon and Albion Street the young people have been asked their views on a name for the new children home on South Park. The meetings have also at times taken a restorative approach and the young people have been engaged in discussing peer relationships and resolving some of the challenges that surround several young people living together.

During the Independent visits, the young people are always offered an opportunity to speak with their visitor on their own, with a peer or just in naturally occurring situations. Overall, the young people across the homes say that they feel supported and feel heard.

For those young people who have had a Child in Care review, Independent Visitors have found strong evidence that they have been supported to complete their consultation documents prior to their review and on many occasions individual direct work has been completed to help them consider their views prior to their review. Feedback from Independent Reviewing Officers is often sought, and this has been positive with them

stating that their young people are fully supported to attend their review by their key worker and helped to ensure their voice is heard.

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 and monthly Junior Journals to share information. An example of this is the Beacon continue a weekly newsletter from a child to their parent to share their updates.

It has been particularly evident within the disabilities homes that the myriad of photographic displays really help to portray the young people's voices through their facial expressions and engagement with their peers and staff members. This is especially important given that their use of the verbal word is often limited due to their communication and additional needs. Example- Haven have communication sheets within the young person's files. This evidences their preferences, likes and dislikes and is often accompanied with pictorial symbols that they can point to for ease of expression.

The young people are encouraged to become involved in meal planning and within the homes the menus each week are set by the young people themselves (within the parameters of promoting a healthy and balanced diet). For those with communication needs, again, pictures are used to help them identify and point to their preferences. Beacon, Secure and Strut have been trying to encourage food from the young people's heritage, which supports their identify.

Other examples of how the young people's voices have been captured and heard is at Albion Street where the young people have been asked what equipment they would like to see in the garden including exploring a forest school. Northholme have re-decorated the young people's bedrooms and they have chosen their own colours and furniture. The Secure Unit completes exit questionnaires to gain their feedback on the care they reviewed. There has been overwhelming evidence within the homes that all the staff have worked hard to encourage the young people to participate in activities of their preferences during the school holidays and at evenings and weekends.

Quality of care

The children within the homes generally continue to receive a good, and in some homes excellent, quality of care. However, it has remained a challenging time for Albion Street. Following the Ofsted full inspection that was carried out on 8 and 9 June 2021 by social care regulatory inspectors, Sarah Orriss and Andi Lilley-Tams a compliance notice was issued to address shortfalls in leadership and management within the home. An Ofsted monitoring visit was undertaken to check the progress against the compliance notice. Following the monitoring visit on 11 August 2021 Ofsted noted that sufficient progress has been made in relation to the compliance notice and due to this it will be removed. Where shortfalls have been identified, an action plan has been identified by managers to address the concerns raised.

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. However, the homes have embraced these challenges and recruitment has been on going where

necessary. The Independent Visitors have found good evidence in homes of new staff being supported and inducted into their new roles.

Across the homes, 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.

At Haven Cottage the team have continued to be stable, however are currently under-going some changes in structure following both the registered manager and assistant manager putting in notice. The staff team have been honest that they feel anxious for the changes ahead and are going to strongly miss the current managers, but some are viewing this as an opportunity for career advancement. Haven has continued to not use agency workers and supported members of the team in developing some of their care skills to meet the needs of certain young people during the night rather than have agency staff in, which has resulted in further continuity.

There have been some vacancies in the Secure Unit during April to October. However, most of these have been filled or are undergoing current recruitment and there is a stable management team in place. An RCO3 who had been on secondment at Albion Street has recently returned to the team, another RCO3 was successful in acquiring the resettlement officer role within the unit and an RCO2 has now been seconded into this position. A recent interim visit was completed on the 18th May where no concerns were received, and the unit has sustained effectiveness.

As outlined within this report the assistant manager has now become the manager, which has provided consistency. She is being supported by the new assistant manager. During this time there was no change in the quality of care provided and the Independent Visits consistently highlighted this.

Training remains a priority within the homes, and whilst there was some initial disruption caused by the impact of COVID, this has started to lessen, and staff are now able to complete their training as this is required. Of significance is the TCI and Social Pedagogy training that is now partially in person, which from feedback by staff members has highlighted is more effective this way. Eastgate has been able to complete some direct training around ligatures and Haven have been able to complete safer moving and handling training in person.

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. This is now moving to some in person meetings, with some being hybrid. The homes have adapted extremely well to the new ways of working throughout the pandemic.

Across the homes staff continue to attend EHCP and EPEP meetings and have responded well to supporting the children and young people with returning to education settings. As outlined within this report, the homes have been flexible in their approach in order to minimise the impact on the young people's routines and stability. The homes continue to provide a range of learning opportunities for the young people according to their individual needs.

The homes continue to follow their scheme of decoration to ensure that they maintain the current quality of the fabric of the building. The autism colours are being used throughout some homes, which is intended to bring a sense of calmness and ease to the environment. They continue to engage the young people in this with examples of meetings being held to discuss this, Northolme allowed the young people to paint their bedrooms, mood boards being created, and the young people being offered trips out to help purchase furnishings of their choice wherever safe and possible. Whilst there are concerns raised over Albion Street, the overall quality of the décor and fabric of the building has improved and been maintained to a good standard.

Each of the homes has ensured the young people have had access to a range of activities. There has been a varied approach to in-house craft activities, and outside trips to activities each young person has particular interests in. Many of the individual pursuits the young people follow have been available such as after school clubs, youth clubs, army cadets and riding. When young people have expressed an interest in attending new activities, this has been fully promoted and supported by staff to put in place if required. All the homes are keen to keeping the young people in activities and promote physical exercise and healthy living.

Positive examples of activities offered include the Secure Unit allowing the young people to pick out activities or games they would like purchased, which has included board games and some remote-control drones. They have arranged visits from reptiles, t-shirt printing and a pottery café came in and the young people were able to decorate cups and plates.

Haven Cottage have themed months and have engaged the young people in 'music medley', 'circus /fair', 'harvest/autumn', making activities in line with the theme. During these months the outer reception areas is decorated by the young people's creative artwork and crafts and at times had themed dinner evenings. Haven have additionally been working with the young people doing litter picking in the local community, which pictures have shown then young people fully enjoying and engaging.

At Strut House has developed outside space significantly, all of this is fully tailored for the additional needs of the young people in the home. All the plants are edible, and the young people have engaged with the garden positively planting tomatoes and chives etc. They have ensured equipment has been adapted for example picnic tables with spaces to allow for wheelchair users. Strut house has additionally promoted the young people in accessing the community and completed the Imp trail, supporting the young people developing their independence.

Eastgate continue to offer the forest school and the young people have learned to build fires under supervision, camp out the night and carve wood objects themselves. They have additionally completed a race for life 5K and completed numerous days out including the wolds wildlife park, the deep, Lincoln castle, and went to the lake district to climb the Via Ferrata. This involves climbing high up a mountain using metal rungs, ladders and bridges. The children completed a 4-hour climb. This does not look like it would be an activity for the faint hearted so is yet another accomplishment for the children where they have proved their willingness to challenge themselves and be pushed outside of their comfort zones.

At the Beacon the staff team continue to engage the young people in activities both at the home and now back in the community. In the home staff continue to be very creative in supporting the young people to achieve their targets promoting and planning activities to encourage positive behaviours and achievements. The Beacon continues to use weekly newsletters and monthly summaries on each young person continue to be completed, with the weekly summaries being displayed in the staff office. These are shared with family and social workers and show a range of pictures of the young people doing a variety of activities, with brief descriptions.

At Northholme, the young people have been able to spend time at the caravan at Butlin's as well as promoting individual young people's interest such as cadets, football club and been engaging in creative therapies once a week which the children love. The young people have also been able to try their hand as outward-bound skills such as orienteering and tracking in the outdoors.

One of the most important priorities for young people is maintaining their sense of identity and links with their families and significant people in their lives. The ever-changing restrictions have meant that staff have had to be flexible and responsive to their approach to this. Home visits are now permitted for all the homes with clear safety guidance in place. Each of the homes provide a significant level of support to ensure family time is maintained and promoted. For example, in Northholme a young person is taken to Newcastle every two weeks. Some of the home's complete daily discussions to parents to ensure they are kept up to date and involved. Young people have been supported to meet for meals in safe organised spaces, parks and the community. The use of video and telephone calls has been widely promoted as has sending cards and letters.

Social Pedagogy and Restorative Practice

Social Pedagogy (SP) and Restorative Practice (RP) continues to develop across the homes and is delivered and recorded to different extents with some homes practice being more embedded than others. However, feedback from the Independent Visitors has been heard and acted upon and it has been noticeable that the range of alternative models used is developing. SP is important as it essentially assists the young people to engage in activities and conversations about the important things that happen within their lives. It aims to make the connections between their 'hands', 'hearts' and 'head', supports social and emotional learning, develops reliance and social skills. This way of working also promotes the young people to consider their own views and how to express these in pro social ways.

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 continues alongside RP to reflect on daily activities and providing a structure for focussed work with the young person following an incident.

This is still 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. Some of the homes have been auditing their SP work to ensure a range of models are being used.

Challenges

The main challenge that all homes have experienced across the board has been in regard to staffing and recruitment. With several changes in several of the homes staff teams at times some of the homes have had to manage on a reduced staff team. Despite this and the obvious challenges of increased stress, more shifts, longer hours it has caused in the homes, most staff spoken to has been complimentary of the staff team they work with and have worked together to effectively manage during difficult times.

Conclusion

Overall, the homes continue to provide good, if not in some instances exceptional, levels of care for the young people in their homes. There have been further concerns raised over the quality of care and leadership at Albion Street and the Local Authority are working proactively to manage this and make the necessary improvements. The Registered Managers are actively promoting multi-agency working and supporting each other to ensure the physical and emotional safety of welfare of the children in their care with positive feedback of their experiences.

The voice of the young people continues to be valued, strived for and promoted being gathered in various methods to ensure they are happy with the care they are being provided. There continues to be extensive promotion to the young people's joy and achievement, by promoting activities in the home as well as the community, a lot of which also support the young people in developing healthy lifestyles.

Some of the homes continue to face challenges in respect of staffing however the good will and flexibility of staff has positively supported the care of the young people particularly during times of isolation and COVID cases which, despite the health and safety concerns, have overall been managed well and robustly.

There remain on-going developments across the residential estate in respect of social pedagogy and restorative practice and there is evidence of sharing of skills across practitioners who are coaching less able and developing colleagues. Staff members have been responsive to these opportunities and have embraced these. Independent Visitors have seen first-hand the motivation and commitment across the homes by staff members that have worked in challenging conditions, but nevertheless have continued to go above and beyond to provide the best care and stability they can to the young people.

The staff teams have worked tirelessly with the young people and their families to maintain their links and attachments, and this has been evidenced in the creative way that family time has been promoted through range of safe opportunities.

APPENDIX A

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. However, due to the COVID pandemic Ofsted have been completing Assurance Visits. These have been shorted visits focused on specific areas. At the current time Ofsted are returning to inspection visits in person.

SECURE UNIT

Assurance Visit

Interim Visit

Visit dates: 18th May 2021

Previous inspection date: 4 February 2020

Previous inspection judgement: *Good*

Information about this visit

Sustained Effectiveness

Recent inspection history

Inspection date

04/02/2020

24/09/2019

Albion Street

Date of Last Inspection: 8 and 9 June 2021 with a monitoring visit taking place on 11 August 2021.

A full inspection was carried out by social care regulatory inspectors, Sarah Orriss and Andi Lilley-Tams, on 8 and 9 June 2021, with a monitoring visit taking place on 11 August 2021. The purpose of the monitoring visit was to check progress against a compliance notice which was issued following the inspection that was carried out on 8 and 9 June 2021. The compliance notice was issued to address shortfalls in leadership and management within the home. The following recommendations were made following the visit on 11 August 21:

Requirement

The health and well-being standard is that -
the health and well-being needs of children are met;

children receive advice,
services and support in relation to their health and well-being; and
children are helped to lead healthy lifestyles.
(Regulation 10 (1)(a)(b)(c)) Due 9th September

The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe.

In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure—
that staff—

assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's relevant plans, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child; and

that the home's day-to-day care is arranged and delivered so as to keep each child safe and to protect each child effectively from harm.

(Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(b))

In particular, this relates to children's risk assessments being maintained and updated to reflect current risk factors and robust management oversight of incidents and events in the home.

Due 9th September

The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and promotes their welfare.

In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications and skills to meet the needs of each child;

Understand the impact that the quality of care provided in the home is having on the progress and experiences of each child and use this understanding to inform the development of the quality of care provided in the home; and use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home.

(Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2) (c)(f)(h))

An action plan to address the recommendations made by Ofsted was created and agreed by Senior Manager and has been reviewed with the Reg 44 visits and subsequent reports.

Following the recent inspection the home is clearly striving to make positive changes. The home continues to work collaboratively with higher management, other registered homes managers and external services. The level of support the home is being provided is robust and being positively received by management and staff.

Beacon

Visit dates: 23 and 24 September 2021

Inspection Judgement: Formal Inspection notification awaiting, however, initial feedback has been provided with indicated that the Inspection judgement is *Good* with areas of *Outstanding*.

Previous inspection date: 8 and 9 December 2020

Previous inspection judgement: *Good*

Northholme

Last Assurance visit 2.2.21 – No concerns raised. Safeguarding judged to be good.

Inspection dates: 12 and 13 February 2020

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people

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: 5 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.

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.