

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR D BRAILSFORD (CHAIRMAN)

Councillors A G Hagues, J D Hough (Vice-Chairman), P J O'Connor and L Wootten.

Added Members: Jean Burbidge (Lincolnshire Community Health Services); Polly Coombes (Foster Carer) and Ted Normandale (National Youth Advocacy Service).

Officer/invited guests in attendance: Karen Bailey (Looked After Children Educational Services Manager); Theresa Buhryn (Performance Development and Reviewing Manager); Clive Chambers (Assistant Director Children's Services Barnardo's Midland Region); Dave Clarke (Secure Unit Principal); Sheridan Dodsworth (Head of Service - SEND); Judith Gilbert (Democratic Services Officer); Jan Gunter (Consultant Nurse, Safeguarding – NHS Lincolnshire); Colin Hopkirk (Participation Officer); Tracy Johnson (Scrutiny Officer); Tara Jones (Joint Head of Regulated Services) and Janice Spencer (Assistant Director Children's Services).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J R Hicks, John Harris (Joint Head of Regulated Services) and Marilyn Graham-Williams (Foster Carer).

2. DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of Members' interests were made at this stage of the proceedings.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 MARCH 2014

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 March 2014 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the following amendment:-

"The Panel was informed that foster carers who had cared for young people for over fifteen years received awards. It was highlighted that one couple had fostered for thirty-five years. It was also noted that Lincolnshire County Council would write to the foster carers expressing their thanks to them for their dedication over the last fifteen years".

4. CARE QUALITY COMMISSION (CQC) – REVIEW OF HEALTH SERVICES FOR CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND SAFEGUARDING IN LINCOLNSHIRE INCLUDING THE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN ANNUAL REPORT FOR HEALTH 2012/2013

Jan Gunter, Consultant Nurse, Safeguarding NHS Lincolnshire introduced the Panel to the Review of Health Services for Children Looked After and Safeguarding in Lincolnshire. The report which focused on the experiences and outcomes for children within the geographical boundaries of the local authority area reported on the performance of health providers serving the area which included NHS trusts, clinical commissioning groups and the local area team of NHS England.

It was noted that the review explored the effectiveness of health services for Looked After Children and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements within health for all children. The review also focused on the experiences of Looked After Children and of children and their families who received safeguarding services.

The Panel was informed that the review centred on:-

- The role of health care providers and commissioners;
- The role of health care organisations in understanding risk factors, identifying needs, communicating effectively with children and families, liaising with other agencies, assessing needs and responding to those needs and contributing to multi-agency assessments and reviews;
- The contribution of health services in promoting and improving the health and wellbeing of Looked After Children which included carrying out health assessments and providing the appropriate services;
- The review checked whether health care organisations were working in accordance with their responsibilities under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 which included the statutory guidance, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013.

The Panel was informed that document reviews, interviews, focus groups and visits were used to gather information for the review.

The Panel felt that the Care Quality Commission report was disappointing and NHS Lincolnshire should have had a stronger emphasis on the children's needs and the importance that they should be fully assessed. The Panel observed that the CQC would be changing the way in which the national level assessments would be conducted in the future and children under the age of five would be assessed by paediatricians.

It was noted that the Annual Report from the Safeguarding NHS Lincolnshire Management Team needed to be stronger. Children's Services Directorate Management Team were critical of the Health Annual Report as they were unable to understand the health profile of Looked After Children from the report. The quality of the Annual Report would be standardised over the next year.

The Panel was informed that an audit of health assessments had been undertaken but the report was not yet ready. The findings from the audit would be reported back

to the Panel later this year. One criticism highlighted was that the assessments were episodic rather than continuous. Public Health would be undertaking an analysis and redesign of health assessment forms and would then evaluate the data and liaise with the Clinical Commissioning Group. The health assessments would include hearing, physical, sensory and learning disabilities. It was also noted that 90% of all Looked After Children had been registered with a dentist and they had received development assessments in the past year. It was also noted that as children grow, some may refuse health assessments, although a nurse would be available to conduct their health assessments if they preferred.

The Panel was informed that the Independent Reviewing Officers would be reviewing each Looked After Child every six months. It was emphasised that the health information of each child was shared with the appropriate Foster Carer. It was reported that each Looked After Child should have a "Blue Book" which was a record of the child's health. It was noted that a "Red Book" was a family health record for children under the age of five and a much greater awareness was needed into the importance of maintaining a child's health record through the "Blue Books" and "Red Books". The Panel observed that a Care Nurse would be recruited to promote the awareness of the "Blue and Red Books" in due course.

The Panel was reminded that there were currently 620 Looked After Children in Lincolnshire and major work was ongoing around the alignment of health care in the County. The Panel was informed that Looked After Children should receive a health assessment within 20 days of being cared for although occasionally this was not possible. The Panel was reassured that these health checks were completed as soon as possible. It was also noted that community paediatricians would be involved in initial health assessments in future and clinics with paediatricians were being developed. The Derbyshire model was being looked at for the future to help meet the 90% target. Work was also being undertaken with Barnardo's on health summaries.

The Panel observed that an audit of the pre-birth protocol had just been completed. A very robust pre-birth protocol was now in place around vulnerable expectant mothers. Midwives could involve other health services at the very earliest stages of pregnancy if they considered there was a need.

The review highlighted that appropriate equipment to meet the assessed needs of Looked After Children with complex disabilities was not provided in a timely way and that this was a long-standing frustration with foster carers. It was reported that, although this had been extensively investigated, there was no evidence to support this claim and it was felt that the process for obtaining specialist equipment be clarified with foster carers.

It was noted that there would shortly be increased capacity in the Safeguarding NHS Lincolnshire Management Team. NHS Lincolnshire would be recruiting two senior nurses, equivalent to Heads of Service, and two staff equivalent to practice supervisors to proactively work around safeguarding and Looked After Children. It was hoped that these appointments would be made before the end of the year. The Clinical Commissioning Groups had invested additional money to enable this staffing increase.

RESOLVED

That the Panel were disappointed with the Care Quality Commission's report and requested an update be presented to the December meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

(Jan Gunter, Consultant Nurse, Safeguarding – NHS Lincolnshire left the meeting at 11.10 am)

5. CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY 2014 – 2016

Colin Hopkirk, Participation Officer, introduced the draft Corporate Parenting Strategy 2014 – 2016 which had been updated by himself and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel and guided the Panel through the document. It was confirmed that the Strategy had received approval and support from the V4C Executive.

The Participation Officer was congratulated on the work and time that had been contributed to the draft Strategy. The Panel was informed that this was very much a working document and the Panel was invited to submit comments and observations on the draft Strategy prior to the end of June. It was also agreed that Looked After Children be consulted on the draft Strategy.

It was noted that the Local Authority, its members and officers, had a legal duty to act as a good and effective Corporate Parent to children and young people in its care and the draft Strategy emphasised that all 77 elected members would understand their Corporate Parenting responsibility and would meet annually with Looked After Children and Leaving Care service professionals. A champion for Looked After Children and Care Leavers would be established within each Working Group, across the directorates of Lincolnshire County Council.

The Panel agreed that a shortened version of the final Strategy would be presented to Looked After Children.

RESOLVED

1. That the draft Strategy be noted and that Panel members feedback any ideas and amendments by the end of June 2014.
2. That the final Strategy be presented to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

6. V4C HALF-YEARLY REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Colin Hopkirk, Participation Officer, introduced the V4C half-yearly report which had been prepared by the Co-Chairs of the V4C Executive.

It was noted that the last six months had been exciting and challenging for the V4C Executive and its sub-groups. There had been a recruitment drive as a number of

young people had left and the Panel was informed the Executive Group now had eleven members.

It was also noted that connections with universities through involvement in assessments and direct training delivery continued to grow and it was suggested that perhaps the young people could have an opportunity to spend time looking around universities thus obtaining valuable experience and confidence.

Reference was made to an animated video created through contributions of Children in Care Councils and elected Members nationally. The new animated video, produced by the National Children's Bureau and A National Voice, highlighted how Looked After Children could have a more effective voice through their Children in Care Councils. It was noted that V4C members and Panel members had contributed to regional work that underpinned the content of the video. It was agreed that a link to the animated video be circulated to members of the Panel.

It was reported that the "Coming into Care App" was now being tested with a small cohort of social workers and young people and this was the first resource of its kind in the country. It was noted that six other local authorities, including two London Boroughs, four regional Authorities and Cumbrian Health had contacted the V4C regularly to learn about the work which had been undertaken by them on the "App". It was noted that Islington was currently liaising with their Children in Care Council regarding inviting the V4C Executive from Lincolnshire to talk with Islington regarding the "Coming into Care App". The "Coming into Care App" would be formally launched in late June/early July and it was confirmed that members of the Corporate Parenting Panel would be invited by the V4C Executive to this launch.

A discussion ensued regarding the importance of involving young people in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and the Panel was informed that it costs each young person £1,000 to undertake the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme. It was noted that 33% fewer Looked After Children had undertaken the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme compared with mainstream children, but of those taking part, success rate percentages of those going through to final awards were very similar to those for mainstream young people. It was felt that this Scheme needed to be promoted consistently amongst Foster Carers and Children's Homes in order to encourage more children to participate in the Scheme. The Scheme would give children greater confidence and self-esteem and children would be able to include the Duke of Edinburgh Award on their CV. It was noted that a report on Duke of Edinburgh participation was scheduled for the next meeting.

It was reported that many activity days had been planned to take place within the next seven months which included a residential weekend in Derbyshire and a visit to High Ropes close to Market Rasen. The Panel was informed that progress was being made with regard to young people in care helping to train Foster Carers in the future.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

7. ACCOMMODATION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND RESPITE CARE

The Panel gave consideration to a report in connection with accommodation available for children with disabilities and respite care in the County.

It was reported that The Beacon was the Local Authority's long-term home for young people with disabilities in Grantham. The Beacon catered for up to 7 young people with learning and/or physical disabilities up to the age of eighteen. It was noted that all young people at the home had regular contact with their parents and in some cases parents visited up to three times each week. The home planned a number of activities for the young people throughout the year. The Panel was informed that The Beacon had an excellent working relationship with Sandon Special School which many of the young people at The Beacon attended. It was highlighted that Ofsted had undertaken an unannounced inspection of The Beacon in May 2013 and noted the outcomes for the young people as "good".

It was reported that a new fifteen bedroomed Beacon would be built and this was shortly going out to tender.

The Panel was informed that Strut House in Lincoln and Haven Cottage in Boston provided residential care for those children who needed "Short Breaks". It was noted that "Short Breaks" was the name which was given to "respite care" and all authorities had a statutory duty to provide "Short Breaks" for children and young people who were disabled and/or sensory impaired. It was noted that building work for an extra bed and a hygiene unit would be undertaken at Haven Cottage, Boston shortly.

The Panel noted that this was the fourth year Strut House, Lincoln and Haven Cottage, Boston had been evaluated by Ofsted as outstanding. The Panel praised the work and commitment of all the staff working in Children's Homes.

It was reported that the majority of families needed to access respite care. Respite accommodation was sometimes not fully utilised which was mainly due to the fact that staff worked very hard with rotas ensuring that the mix of young people who needed respite care was compatible and well-balanced.

It was noted that the number of disabled children had increased by 62% since 1975. It was felt that this was mainly due to an increased advancement in medical science; therefore, more people were now able to live longer than previously.

The Panel was informed that The Thomas Centre based at Covenham St Mary provided fully accessible holiday facilities for all families who needed support. It offered a peaceful, safe and tranquil setting for respite care and was available to all families.

St Bernard's School in Louth provided short breaks for young people with disabilities during weekends and school holidays. The school was able to accommodate five children per night and had 14 young people accessing this provision currently. It

was noted that short breaks at the school were largely funded by health although Children's Services had topped up funding in the last two years.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

8. INDEPENDENT CHAIR SERVICE (REVIEW)

Theresa Buhryn, Independent Chair Manager, presented to the Panel the Independent Chair Review's Annual Report from April 2013 – March 2014.

It was noted that during the past twelve months the numbers of Looked After Children had continued to fluctuate. It was confirmed that there were now 620 Looked After Children in Lincolnshire.

It was also noted that two additional full-time posts had been approved along with one Quality Assurance Apprentice post. These posts would shortly be advertised and it was hoped that the posts would be filled by the Autumn.

The Panel observed that Signs of Safety training had been undertaken by the majority of Independent Chairs during this year. It was also noted that the Independent Review Service had responded positively to the Ofsted report "Independent Reviewing Officers: Taking up the Challenge?" This report summarised the findings from visitors by Inspectors to ten local authorities between November 2012 and June 2013. It was explained that Independent Review Officers were now challenging schools on the use of pupil premiums they received for each child they taught. It was noted that from April 2014 the guidance on the pupil premium had changed which meant there would be a greater control on what the pupil premium would be spent on. The pupil premium would now be given to local authorities who would passport it to schools. For each Looked After Child there was £1,900 available and an initial £600 could be given to the school for each pupil although the school would have to explain how it would use the additional money.

The Panel observed that Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) had been proactive in developing improved working relationships with CAFCASS Guardians. A national Independent Chair/CAFCASS Protocol had also been developed and agreed locally.

The Panel noted that other areas identified for improvement included:-

- Further implementation of Signs of Safety;
- Continuing to maintain links with regional colleagues;
- The signing off and implementation of the Independent Chairs/CAFCASS Protocol;
- To establish arrangements for independent legal advice for Independent Chairs.

It was confirmed that the Leaving Care Contract was currently out to tender.

It was noted that when children became Looked After, they each received a Children in Care Kit which contained information about the role of an Independent Reviewing Officer and the purpose of the Reviews. Children were encouraged to participate in their Reviews and it was noted that many of the children in care completed feedback forms and made positive comments. Concern was expressed that negative comments were perhaps not being reported or recorded and it was felt imperative that any negative comments were addressed. The Panel suggested that the next update should include minority views from user feedback also.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted and an update on the minority views from user feedback be included in the next report to the December meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

9. OFSTED SERVICE REPORT – CHILDREN'S HOMES

The Panel gave consideration to a report regarding the standard of residential care in Lincolnshire. It was reported that every residential Children's Home in Lincolnshire was inspected twice a year and these inspections were unannounced. It was also noted that all the residential Children's Homes were providing a good standard of care to the young people. The residential Children's Homes in Lincolnshire, who had not been judged as outstanding, were working closely with those that had been awarded outstanding status to establish what changes they needed to make in order that they would be able to implement similar changes.

It was noted that inspection activities included:

- Listening and talking to children and young people;
- Observing staff interactions with children and young people;
- Observation of key activities such as handovers of information between staff;
- Gathering views from partners and stakeholders such as parents, social workers and teachers;
- Case file reading;
- Examination of records;
- Discussions with managers and staff.

It was noted that children living in residential Children's Homes were frequently monitored according to their needs and the staff working in residential Children's Homes also received supervision intermittently. It was agreed that the wording around regular supervision in the policy needed some further clarification.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

10. VISITING MEMBERS – LOG OF QUARTERLY VISITS TO CHILDREN'S HOMES FROM APRIL 2013 – MARCH 2014

The Panel gave consideration to the Visiting Members – Log of Quarterly Visits to Children's Homes from April 2013 – March 214. Concern was expressed that visits from Councillors to Children's Homes had not been completed and the Chairman emphasised the importance of these visits in relation to the feedback received from the Children's Homes. It was noted that 33 Northolme needed allocating to another Councillor to visit.

A verbal report was given by Councillor L Wootten in connection with her visit to The Beacon Residential Children's Home in Grantham which was a home looking after fifteen children with autism. It was noted that planning permission had been granted to build a new "Beacon". It was also noted that the staff were very attentive and the accommodation very clean and tidy. The bedrooms of each of the children had been decorated according to their individual tastes and felt comfortable. There was a garden which had toys and go carts for the older children.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

*(Colin Hopkirk, Participation Officer and Polly Coombes, Foster Carer,
left the meeting at 12.55 pm)*

11. ADOPTION REFORM UPDATE

The Panel gave consideration to a report which outlined an ambitious adoption reform programme to ensure that more children, for whom adoption was the best option, could be placed quicker with permanent families to ensure they had the best chances in life. The Government's programme of adoption reform aimed to address the length of time a child waited to be adopted, the falling number of annual adoptions, and the recruitment and subsequent support to adoptive parents.

It was reported that in January 2013, the Department for Education announced grant funding to local authorities to support adoption reform activity and in February 2013, Lincolnshire County Council was awarded the grant which was divided into two parts. Part A, which totalled £1,276,840 was non ring-fenced and was to support whole system reform to ensure that children were adopted quickly. Part B of the grant, which totalled £486,650 was ring-fenced and was specifically for the recruitment of adopters. The Executive had agreed a total of £638,420 of the non-ring fenced grant to be spent across the adoption service. In January 2014 a further one off non-ring fenced adoption reform grant was announced by the Department of Education and the total grant allocation to Lincolnshire was £644,283. The purpose of the grant was to recognise the programmes of change under way in adoption services, particularly in the areas of marketing and recruitment, reducing delay and post adoption support.

It was noted that from a prospective foster carer making initial enquiries regarding becoming a foster carer to actually being placed with a child would take approximately eight months. It was also noted that very few children who were placed for adoption were returned to foster care. The Panel observed that rigorous

matching between children and foster carers and other fostered children takes place to ensure a suitable match.

(Ted Normandale, National Youth Advocacy Service, left the meeting at 1.15 pm)

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

12. CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME 2014

The Scrutiny Officer introduced this item and it was agreed that the CQC Health Review report be included in the December meeting and the Corporate Parenting Strategy be included on the Agenda for the next meeting in September.

RESOLVED

That the Work Programme presented be amended accordingly.

The meeting closed at 1.20 pm.