

**16 July 2012****Agenda Item: 9****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE****INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY SERVICE FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN  
AND YOUNG PEOPLE****Purpose of the Report**

1. To report on the current arrangements for the provision of the Advocacy Service for Looked After Children and Young People and the planned increase of the service in 2012-2014.

**Information and Advice**

2. The DN11 Serious Case Review, which considered the sexual abuse of a number of young boys placed in foster care, recommended that the Council review the Advocacy Service it provides to its Looked After Children population and report the review to the Corporate Parenting Sub Committee and the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children's Board.
3. Nottinghamshire, working in partnership with Nottingham City Council, commissions an external and independent Advocacy Service for Looked After Children. In March 2011, Barnardo's successfully tendered to supply both Nottinghamshire County Council and Nottingham City Council with an Advocacy Service.
4. This contract consists of three separate lots:
  - a Children's Advocacy and Independent Visitors Service, costing £86,962 in its first year and rising to £125,106 in its third year.
  - Advocacy for Young People in Secure Accommodation, costing £12,807 in its first year and £12,728 for the successive two years.
  - an Issue-Based Advocacy Service, which is contracted on a 'spot purchase' basis at a cost of £43 per hour. This potentially provides a service for young people in the Child Protection process, particularly in relation to Child Protection Conferences.
5. There were some difficulties, which continued for several months, concerning TUPE arrangements for staff transferring from the previous provider, NYAS, into the Barnardo's Service, which caused delay in the initial stages of providing the commissioned services. In January 2012, following some discussion with Barnardo's around their difficulties in meeting the service level agreement, a decision was taken to change the management of

the project and implement a very clear plan for offering the service that the two Local Authorities had commissioned and were funding.

6. In March 2012, Barnardo's met the targets set by the terms of the contract.
7. At the point of the tendering process in 2009/10, Nottinghamshire County Council's Looked after Children Population was in the region of 400 children and young people. In 2012 this has increased significantly to 804, in line with national trends. As a result of this increase the number of children and young people who may require an Independent Visitor has increased.
8. Any Looked After young person who requests an Independent Visitor is entitled to one. Currently there are 35 young people, 18 of which are Looked After by Nottinghamshire, who have been matched to an Independent Visitor. There are 31 young people, 16 in Nottinghamshire, waiting to be allocated.
9. 75 Residential Establishments have been visited and there is now a much clearer system for ensuring that Barnardo's are notified of all the units (including out-of-county placements) in which Nottinghamshire young people are placed.
10. There are two Independent Advocates attached to Clayfields Secure Unit, who deal specifically with issues for these young people.
11. The current established contract regarding Issue-based Advocacy and Advocacy to Clayfields Secure Unit meets the needs of those services, but the Advocacy and Independent Visitor Service for Looked After Children and Young People has been struggling to deal with the increasing demand within the budget available through the original contract.
12. Consideration was given to whether this contract would need to be re-tendered, given the difficulties being experienced with Barnardo's initial inability to meet the terms of the contract. However, given the lengthy TUPE process, and the time needed to set the service up, the decision was taken to continue with the current provider but set very clear expectations. Barnardo's were viewed as the preferred provider based on both a slightly lower cost and the fact that it was a well established national organisation, which should have less difficulty covering a service that would need to be countrywide, including those young people placed out of county.
13. Research carried out by the NSPCC suggests that any one Independent Visitor Coordinator can manage a maximum of 40 Independent Visitors/Advocates.
14. Under the structure proposed and agreed through the procurement process, Barnardo's were unable to offer a high quality, safely managed Advocacy/Independent Visiting Service to any more than approximately 40 young people at any given time. They are now in the position where they have recruited a large number of volunteers and could increase the number of young people being offered this service. In order to do so, they would need to employ another staff member to manage the additional volunteers. The cost of extending this service is in the region of £36,000. This allows for another 40 young people to be supported by the Advocacy/Independent Visiting Service. Currently Nottinghamshire County Council has 16 young people awaiting a service.

15. The additional investment into this service of £36,000 per annum, pro-rata for 2012/13 and for the full year 2013/14, will ensure that the young people currently waiting for an Independent Visitor will have one allocated and also that there is some additional capacity in the service to allow for a further increase. This additional investment will be funded from within the division's existing budget.

### **Other Options Considered**

16. The report is for noting only.

### **Statutory and Policy Implications**

17. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

### **RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1) That Committee notes the current arrangements for the provision of the Advocacy Service for Looked After Children and Young People and the planned increase of the service in 2012-2014.

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### **Constitutional Comments**

18. As this report is for noting only, no Constitutional Comments are required.

### **Financial Comments (NDR 06/07/12)**

19. The financial implications are referred to in paragraph 15 of the report.

### **Background Papers**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

**Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

All.

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