

**8 June 2015****Agenda Item: 7**

## **REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE**

### **ADVOCACY SERVICE FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide information about the Advocacy Service for Looked After Children.

#### **Information and Advice**

2. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 s.26A imposes a duty on the Local Authority to make arrangements for the provision of advocacy services.
3. Since 1 April 2014 the Advocacy Service for Looked After Children (LAC) in Nottinghamshire and Nottingham City has been provided by the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) as a joint contract. The contract was awarded to NYAS following a competitive tendering process. The NYAS bid was scored most highly by the Children in Care Council and the Commissioning Teams from City and County. The bid was favoured because in addition to having years of experience of delivering specialist advocacy services NYAS has a 24 hour helpline which can be accessed by all our LAC young people.
4. The service specification requires NYAS to visit all young people placed in external and internal residential units no less than eight weekly. This is in addition to representing children and young people with specific concerns at Looked After Reviews and enabling them to use the complaints systems. NYAS also has responsibility for visiting and representing children and young people who are in secure accommodation at Clayfields House and young people secured on welfare orders.
5. NYAS employs a number of full-time and sessional advocates, using staff from other regions where these are based nearer to our young people (for example, using staff from their Cumbria office to advocate for our young people living in Cumbria)
6. There is additional provision, which can be spot-purchased, for young people involved in safeguarding processes or who need advocacy in relation to other services such as special educational needs and disability (SEND) processes. There is an increasing demand for this service, with two or three young people per quarter requesting representation at initial or review case conferences.
7. NYAS has maintained the regular visiting schedule which forms the backbone of the contract with them. By visiting young people regularly, relationships are established and

young people are more likely to approach an advocate when they have a specific issue for which they require representation. NYAS appointed new staff and visits were made every four weeks to ensure there were no delays in establishing visits during contract implementation. To ensure that reporting and recording of visits by NYAS is consistent, a Placements Team officer now meets monthly with NYAS to reconcile the Authority's lists of Looked After Young people with their data and ensure young people are all receiving the service.

8. In addition to the residential visiting advocacy, NYAS undertakes issues based advocacy when they represent young people with specific issues. On average nine children per quarter use the issues based advocacy service. The majority of requests are for an advocate to attend a meeting with a young person (generally a Looked After review) and support them to give their views. Advocates have also supported young people making complaints and applying for benefits.
9. Annual reporting on delivery of the advocacy service in Clayfields House demonstrates that again young people confide in their advocates after a period of visiting has allowed a relationship to be established. The majority of young people placed at Clayfields House are from out of county and require support from advocates to represent their views about where they would like to live or services they would like to receive when they return home. Clayfields House has given positive feedback about the advocacy service from NYAS.
10. Finally NYAS has a contract to provide an Independent Visiting Service for Looked after Children. Independent Visitors are volunteers who visit Looked After young people to support and befriend them. NYAS has spent the last year recruiting and training volunteers in addition to supporting existing relationships.

### **Case Study of Independent Visiting Service**

11. K was referred to the service in September 2011 by her social worker, foster carer and health professionals who felt that a positive female role model who could offer some time away from her placement and also the opportunity to engage in new activities would make a positive impact on her life.
12. K had a chaotic upbringing and was neglected by her biological family so the Independent Visitor Service offered an opportunity for K to gain confidence and boost her self-esteem. K was quite isolated in her placement when the initial referral was made and was living away from the area in which she grew up and her family contact, although settled, could sometimes be difficult for K.
13. K is a young person who is very keen on animals and enjoys getting involved and learning about them, so she was matched with a volunteer Independent Visitor (IV) who had similar interests. K was matched with her IV in November 2011 and is still matched with the same volunteer to date. K has had opportunity to take part in lots of activities with her Independent Visitor including indoor sledging, painting pots, falconry experiences, visiting wildlife parks, going to the cinema and out for a meal and most recently a visit to a hedgehog convention which she really enjoyed.

14. The service has followed the match and assessed progress for K and the impact that having a volunteer Independent Visitor has made. K reported that having an IV had helped improve things in her life, increased her confidence and that she really likes her IV. She said the service had helped her to do more of the activities she enjoys, that she looked forward to seeing her IV and that the presence of her IV had helped her to increase her self-esteem. When asked what she enjoyed most or she would change she said 'I have enjoyed everything'. At the same evaluation point her foster carer was asked to feedback to the service - she said that 'K has become more confident and the IV always makes the trips out exciting and enjoyable. K looks forward to the trips; they have a good relationship and always have fun together. I cannot thank the IV enough, these visits support both me and K and the IV is a credit to the service'.
15. Although the service has been a positive one for K, it has also added an extra level of safeguarding for her as she grows and changes; the regular visits by the IV have highlighted some issues for K both currently and along their match journey, including areas such as hygiene and her relationship with her foster carer which have been relayed to social care and have enabled positive change for K.
16. K is 13 and the match is planned to continue until she is 18; if this is possible it will make it one of NYAS's longest running matches and will hopefully have delivered many years of stability, confidence building and a positive role model for K alongside the hard work of the Local Authority, enabling her to grow and achieve her maximum potential.

#### **Other Options Considered**

17. The report is for noting only.

#### **Reason/s for Recommendation/s**

18. The report is for noting only.

#### **Statutory and Policy Implications**

19. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working 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 the information about the Advocacy Service for Looked After Children be noted.

**Steve Edwards**  
**Service Director, Children's Social Care**

**For any enquiries about this report please contact:**

Shelagh Mitchell  
Group Manager, Access to Resources  
T: 0115 9774169  
E: shelagh.mitchell@nottsc.gov.uk

**Constitutional Comments**

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

**Financial Comments (SS 15/05/15)**

21. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

**Background Papers and Published Documents**

None.

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

All.

C0640