

22 September 2014**Agenda Item: 6****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE****LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN STRATEGY UPDATE****Purpose of the Report**

1. To update the Sub-Committee on the progress of the action plan for the Looked After Children Strategy.

Information and Advice

2. It was identified that our approach to Looked After Children would benefit from the development of an over-arching strategy which outlines the commitment of the Council and our partner agencies to supporting children in care. The strategy has been developed based on what young people have told us is important to them in The Pledge for Looked After Children, published in October 2010.
3. Nottinghamshire's commitments to Looked After Children, as set out in The Pledge, underpin our Looked After Children Strategy which was published in August 2012. This strategy identifies the Council's ambition for its Looked After Children and young people, ensuring that they receive placements that meet their needs, have access to high quality education and enjoy positive activities that support them to achieve their full potential. For those children who require permanent alternative families it means ensuring that effective plans are made so that they achieve permanence as quickly as possible.
4. The LAC Strategy action plan, a summary of which is attached as **Appendix 1**, had a number of work streams which included piloting new panel arrangements for entry to care, reviewing the support in place for kinship care and care leavers, and the wider range of options for permanency available to children and young people in the care system.
5. Key actions in all priority areas have been completed which include:
 - a review of The Pledge for Looked After Children to ensure it continues to reflect the priorities of children in care in Nottinghamshire
 - the establishment of a Permanence Panel to ensure greater scrutiny of permanent placements and ensure robust support arrangements are in place
 - production of a new review booklet to ensure young people's voices are heard and that they shape their own care plans

- a new guide to adoption is available for older children and young people to help them understand the opportunities and challenges this presents, and how they can influence the process
 - all new Looked After Children and existing Looked After Children with significant changes to circumstance will have a designated Educational Psychologist
 - two additional Looked After Children Achievement Officers have been recruited to the Virtual School
 - most district councils are now offering free or reduced cost sports and leisure activities for Looked After Children and young people
 - a new data sharing system is in place between Health and Children's Social Care that will assist in identifying health concerns of Looked After Children
 - the number of salaried carers for young people in need of specialist foster care placements has increased
 - a new Family Assessment and Contact Service has been established which provides a consistent approach to contact across the County
 - increased leave is available for Nottinghamshire County Council staff who are taking on the care of a child through a special guardianship order
6. In order to enable better communication and networking with young people, intentions were to set up a Facebook page specifically for Looked After Children. Unfortunately, due to issues regarding security and access, the LAC Strategy steering group has agreed that there will be no further action on this.
7. The LAC Strategy steering group continues to identify and monitor further work which supports the Council's commitment to children in care. Following the publication of the '*From a Distance*' Ofsted thematic inspection report in April 2014, the steering group agreed to conduct an audit of all cases of Looked After Children who are living at a significant distance from their home area. The findings of the audit will be reported to the steering group in September 2014, and any additional areas identified for improvement will be monitored through the action plan.

Other Options Considered

8. The report is for noting only.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

9. The report is for noting only.

Statutory and Policy Implications

10. 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.

Implications for Service Users

11. Looked After Children will benefit from clear commitments from the County Council and partner agencies which support them, based on what young people in care have told us is important to them in The Pledge.

Public Sector Equality Duty Implications

12. The Strategy commits Council and partner services to giving Looked After Children the same opportunities as any other group of children and young people.

Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Adults Implications

13. The Strategy strengthens the commitment of the Council and partners to effectively safeguarding this vulnerable group of children and young people.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That the update on the progress of the action plan for the Looked After Children Strategy be noted.

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Constitutional Comments

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

Financial Comments (KLA 28/08/14)

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

Background Papers and Published Documents

Looked After Children Strategy – report to Policy Committee on 18 July 2012
Looked After Children Strategy update – report to Policy Committee on 16 January 2013
Looked After Children Strategy update - report to Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee on 17 March 2014

'From a Distance' Ofsted thematic inspection report - April 2014

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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