

Meeting CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMITTEE

Date Monday 22 September 2014 (commencing at 2.00 pm)

**Membership**

Persons absent are marked with an 'A'

**COUNCILLORS**

Liz Plant (Chairman)

John Allin  
Boyd Elliott  
Kate Foale  
Alice Grice

Philip Owen  
Sue Saddington  
Jacky Williams

**Foster Carer**

Dawn Clements  
Aleks Jackowska  
Sarah Maiden

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE**

Di Brady	-	Service Manager, Childrens Social Care
David Ebbage	-	Assistant Democratic Services Officer, Policy, Planning & Corporate Services Department
Steve Edwards	-	Service Director, Childrens Social Care
Michelle Lee	-	Aftercare Service Manager
Izzy Martin	-	Service Manager, Independent Chair Service
Philippa Milbourne	-	Business Support Assistant, Children, Families & Cultural Services Department.
Shelagh Mitchell	-	Service Manager, Adoption

**MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2014, having been circulated to all Members, were taken as read and were confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

None.

Councillor Alice Grice replaced Councillor Colleen Harwood for this meeting only.

## **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **END OF YEAR REPORT FOR THE INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER**

Izzy Martin updated members about the activities within the Independent Reviewing Officer Service during April 2013 to March 2014.

The report focused on the key functions of the IRO's and highlights the work undertaken in respect of children and young people.

Over the past year there had been a continued focus to increase the number of permanent staff within the service; the recruitment drive had been very successful with only 2 posts left to fill. With that being so successful, the group are now more settled and cohesive.

Service Managers now observe IROs in reviews and chair meetings to promote consistency and individual development. Feedback from agencies had been positive about the chairing skills of the Nottinghamshire IROs.

IROs gathered information and offered feedback in respect of the involvement and contribution of social care and external organisations. Where there had been significant concerns relating to practice or drift, the IRO initiated alerts to the social care team manager or raise the practice issue with the relevant external organisation. During 2013-2014, a total of 190 alerts were raised. This was a significant increase over the previous two years and evidences that the IROs are more robust in challenging the local authority where appropriate about concerns relating to practice, including any delay in progressing recommendations.

The following were the key themes noted with regard to the alerts processed:

- incomplete assessments causing delay in decisions about planning
- permanence options for young person not fully explored
- pathway plan not completed fully
- delay in requesting initial LAC Review when child placed in a Regulation 24 placement with family
- delay in making application for court proceedings to be initiated to secure permanence for children
- lack of preparation for young person leaving care absence of appropriate paperwork; Personal Education Plan, health assessment and essential information

More recently the service introduced a system for raising practice issues with external organisations where there were concerns about their contribution to the needs identified in the child or young person's plan.

Participation and engagement of children and young people had improved. A 'Signs and Symbols' leaflet has been developed for 0-18 year olds. This work involved young people from the Children in Care Council, service providers, specialist schools and two IROs with specialist knowledge of working with children with disabilities. This has now been finalised and been printed.

Following questions from Members, the following points were made:-

- The IRO's are employed by the County Council, two service managers cover the service but their role is totally independent.
- Members requested data regarding the key themes from previous years so they could see the improvements made. This will be available at a future meeting. The information given was on reviews as well. In most cases better care plans are now in place and the IRO's purpose is to quality assure and protect that LAC.
- Section 4 of the report explained about the 190 alerts raised, but with the IRO's involved, cases have reduced to 70-75.
- Care plans are improving, dedicated Looked after Children teams are now fully trained which the IRO's and social workers are also being involved.

The Chair Izzy Martin for the clear and honest information in the report.

### **RESOLVED 2014/013**

That the activities of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service from April 2013 to March 2014 be noted

### **ADOPTION SERVICES BI-ANNUAL REPORT**

Shelagh Mitchell introduced the report to Members providing them a six-monthly update on activities in the Adoption Service from March to August 2014.

In her update the following points were made:-

There is a consistent media presence in Nottinghamshire which has helped more people to come forward and wanting to adopt children. The service has been taking children from other local authorities and placing them within the County. This has impacted positively on national performance on numbers of children waiting.

The number of adopters that Nottinghamshire County Council recruits continues to be approximately 60 per annum, thus performance has improved by almost 100% since 2011-12. This, coupled with the high numbers of children placed means we now have very few children waiting; we have now matched children who have waited a substantial period of time. Those now waiting have complexities which make them harder to place.

The adoption quarterly data has now returned to the Adoption Leadership Board, and included data regarding adults in assessment, or approved adopters. For adults the information had not been reported by all local authorities, but the first national reporting showed an increase in adopters and only about 30-40% of assessments being within six months (national figures). Nottinghamshire's Adoption Service currently processes approximately 60% of assessment within six months

Following questions from Members the following points were made:-

- The national average for performance is 30-40% so Nottinghamshire in general is way above that. The timescales for approving adopters is ambitious but with children who have complex needs can delay the process to find the right adoptee.
- In regards to placing children from other local authorities, the County Council receives the national standard rate of £27,000 from those authorities.
- Foster to Adopt is a set of new regulators. Place children with approved adopters and are able to take the child much earlier in child's care.

## **RESOLVED 2014/014**

That the six-monthly update on activity in the adoption service from March to August 2014 be noted.

## **LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN STRATEGY UPDATE**

Steve Edwards updated the Sub-Committee on the progress of the action plan for the Looked after Children Strategy.

The strategy has been in there for 18 months now and has made a positive difference to lives of Looked after Children population. All the following points have now been completed:-

- 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 is taking on the care of a child through a special guardianship order.

Following questions from Members the following points were made:-

- Members wanted to know if there was a more secure way of using social media for LAC. There is a detailed response which explains the reasons of why this was not progressed, which will get provided for Members to have a look at.
- Point 47 in the Appendix has now been completed. It is being put together now and will be brought to the next meeting.
- LAC is the highest priority in the school admissions code; some schools do have issues accepting LAC.
- Foster carers explained the difficulties of Facebook with having a LAC. Their first thought is to locate their birth parents.

## **RESOLVED 2014/015**

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

## **LEAVING CARE SERVICE UPDATE**

Michelle Lee provided an update on the Leaving Care Team. The last update came to the March meeting; there has been no change to the structure or specification since then.

The number of young people the team have been working with has increased from 290 to 316 (July 2014). An increase had been predicted due to the higher numbers of looked after young people, especially the growing number of 16 and 17 year olds in care. There has also been an increase in young people returning for services after the age of 21 years due to returning to education and requiring support. The average Personal Adviser caseload is now 24.

64 of the 270 (or 23%) over 18 year olds open to the team live outside of Nottinghamshire. The majority are in adjoining areas with only 14 living outside a 50 mile radius of the County. These include young people who are at university and young people who have chosen to remain with foster carers over the age of 18 years.

An annual performance report is provided to the DfE annually. 2013/14 had seen a change in how and what is reported. Overall, of 235 care leavers (aged 18 to 21 years) 82% were in suitable accommodation and 38% were not in education, employment or training. It was not possible to compare these outcomes with previous performance due to the changes made by Government to the data collection criteria.

The LAC service considers accommodation options post 18 with young people from the age of 16 years. At 17.5 years, when the Personal Advisers are introduced to young people, the search for more permanent, stable and affordable accommodation begins in earnest. At 18 years the statutory duty of the local authority to provide accommodation ends and so the focus of activity is to support young people with

applications for housing as adults. A snapshot of the current circumstances of 19 year olds and above revealed that:

- 16% are living with friends or family
- 49% are living independently
- 9% are in semi-independent accommodation.

Those statistics are within a year of coming out of care.

4% (8) of the 193 19 to 21 year old care leavers were currently being supported in prison. Nationally 23% of the adult prison population has been in care and almost 40% of prisoners under 21 years were in care as children. Only 2% of the general population spend time in prison.

The Staying Put policy which allowed young people to remain with foster carers over the age of 18 up to 21 years proved to be very successful. According to financial records 19 young people are currently in a Staying Put arrangement. The weekly cost to the Authority for these arrangements in July 2014 was £3,200. Central Government has announced £40m funding for Staying Put across the country and Nottinghamshire's allocation is £67,058. At current running costs this will lead to a deficit of £99,342.

Following questions from Members the following points were raised:-

- Since the virtual school stops at 16 years of age, the LAC Strategy does help with the transitional work from education to employment. Schools did have the option of the career service but they now have to buy into that service.
- Members wondered whether the district councils could input any help with extra housing provision but this proved very difficult and only was arranged in emergency cases. .

## **RESOLVED 2014/016**

That the Leaving Care Service Update be noted.

## **HOUSE OF COMMONS EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT ON RESIDENTIAL CHILDREN'S HOMES**

Steve Edwards gave an update on a report issued by the House of Commons Education Committee which made a series of recommendations in relation to Residential Children's Homes.

The report noted that there were significant concerns relating to children being placed far away from where they came in to care from. National analysis has highlighted that some homes are located in close proximity to risks such as drug crime, registered sex offenders and prison releases.

Within Nottinghamshire, 72% of looked after children are placed within 20 miles of the address they came in to care from. This is above average when compared with other county councils.

## **RESOLVED 2014/017**

- 1) That the recommendations made by the House of Commons Education Committee in relation to Residential Children's Care be noted.
- 2) That the activity taking place in Nottinghamshire to address the issues highlighted in the House of Commons Education Committee report be noted.

### **CONTACT SERVICE UPDATE**

Di Brady provided an update on the changing role of the Contact Service with regard to LAC and the progress that had been achieved throughout a review of the service.

During her update, the following points were made:-

- The Contact Service provided a County-wide service and has been operational since June 2012, following an 18 month pilot project. In August 2013, 476 children were having contact arranged by the Contact Service compared with 269 in August 2012 – an increase of 77% in terms of caseloads.
- A Position Statement was submitted to the Programme Board in September 2013, with a series of recommendations. The decision was made to launch a project to explore some of the recommendations made and the project was initiated and an Interim Service Manager was appointed. The specific service areas that required improvement were listed in Paragraph 10 of the report.
- Children and young people have been consulted through the Children in Care Council and reported that:
  - 24% would prefer evening sessions (6-8pm)
  - 33% would prefer weekend sessions
  - They wanted venues which have activities they enjoy doing, are safe and are close to where they live.
- The current staffing and the role of the Contact Support Worker had been reviewed. Part of the review had also removed the role of the Contact Co-ordinator who provided a business support function. Other changes proposed within the model meant that the CSWs now arranged their own contacts and therefore proposed a reduction in business support posts. This had provided a number of significant benefits which were listed in Paragraph 16 of the report.
- Staff had historically been required to transport children across large geographical areas, this had been a very costly and inefficient use of resources and had led to a £64,624 spend on staff mileage during the first nine months of financial year 2013/14.
- For the current year, it is anticipated that there will be overall saving of £225,000.

### **RESOLVED 2014/018**

That the update on the changing role of the Contact Service be noted.

### **WORK PROGRAMME**

The updated work programme was considered by Members.

### **RESOLVED 2014/012**

That the Committee's work programme be noted.

### **FOSTER CARERS ITEMS**

All issues were dealt with at the recent FLAG meeting.

The meeting closed at 3.35pm

**CHAIRMAN**

22 Sept 2014