

**13 March 2017****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 to support a young person who intends to make a complaint. Subsequent statutory guidance on care planning, child protection and the fostering National Minimum Standards all make reference to children having a right to access advocacy support.
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 Nottinghamshire's LAC and young people.
4. The service specification requires NYAS to visit all young people placed in external and internal residential units no less than every eight weeks. This is in addition to accepting referrals to represent 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.
5. NYAS employs sessional advocates. There are currently nine trained advocates available to work with Nottinghamshire young people as well as the salaried advocate who is specific to the contract. As a national organisation, NYAS is able to use staff from other regions where these are based closer to the care placement of a Nottinghamshire young person.
6. There is additional provision, which can be spot-purchased, for young people who are not looked after but are involved in safeguarding procedures and who may need support

so their views can be heard in the initial conference or review conference. Similarly the service can respond, if requested, to those who need advocacy in relation to special educational needs or disability processes. There continues to be a low take up for this service in the County.

7. NYAS maintains a visiting schedule and all residential homes with Nottinghamshire young people placed are visited by an advocate. By visiting young people in residential settings 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. To ensure that reporting and recording of visits by NYAS is consistent, a Commissioning Officer from the Placements Team meets quarterly with NYAS to review performance. This process is conducted jointly with Nottingham City Social Care. Other more frequent local contact between the Placements Team and NYAS helps reconcile the Authority's lists of Looked After young people with NYAS data to ensure young people in residential placements are all receiving the service.
8. Over the last three quarters of the current financial year (April-December 2016), 473 visits were made by NYAS to Nottinghamshire young people in residential settings and on average 76 young people were seen during each quarter. The number of calls by children and young people to the NYAS national helpline over the same period was 28. The latest quarterly performance monitoring meeting was held on 30 January 2017 and the figures in this report are taken from that meeting.
9. In addition to the residential visiting, NYAS undertakes "issue-based advocacy" where they provide support for young people to address their specific concerns. During Quarter 3 the number of referrals for an advocate received by NYAS was 21. Requests received were mainly in relation to placement moves/concerns; attendance at Looked After Reviews or issues with carers/social workers. NYAS held 36 open cases of issue-based advocacy for Nottinghamshire young people during the quarter.
10. 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. An advocate has been into Clayfields House each week during the last quarter and 32 young people have had the opportunity to express views on their care.
11. Finally NYAS has a contract to provide an Independent Visiting Service for Looked After Children. Independent Visitors are volunteers who visit young people in care to support and befriend them. NYAS recruit and train volunteers. This service has shown only slow growth in the training of volunteers with a further two fully trained in quarter 3. This has not been aided by the fact the coordinator has been absent due to sickness and latterly maternity. A service manager and a coordinator from another area are covering the post whilst a short term contract is advertised. The number of fully trained Independent Visitors available to Nottinghamshire is currently six although four are currently "on hold" due to work or personal commitments. There are currently two Nottinghamshire young people matched and another 17 awaiting a match. It is expected at least a further four matches will be made in quarter 4. On a positive note, there are has been a substantial

increase this last quarter in the number of people (11) contacting the service to express an interest in volunteering to be an Independent Visitor.

### **Progress of contract**

12. The contract with NYAS is due to end on 31 March 2017. There is then the option to extend the contract, initially for a further year and possibly for two. After consideration an extension of six months has been agreed with NYAS until the end of September 2017. The service provided by NYAS, whilst adequate, suffered from staffing difficulties and after a slow start has struggled to maintain the levels of residential visiting expected in the contract. This has mitigated against developing the service further and in some aspects, Independent Visiting for example, the waiting list remains long. The extension will allow time for Nottinghamshire and Nottingham City to revise contract specification targets and to complete the tender for a provider. It is expected that the new advocacy contract will continue to be jointly commissioned by the two Authorities but at the time of writing Nottingham City have not yet officially confirmed their continued participation. Joint work on the specification is already underway and joint meetings with commissioning and procurement staff have taken place. In the unlikely event Nottingham City decide not to renew, Nottinghamshire will continue to commission an external service. The value of the future contract will not exceed that of the current contract.
13. Consideration will be given to a specification which includes residential visits to those looked after young people who have moved on from residential care and into sixteen plus supported accommodation. Many are housed in staffed “core” accommodation within the county and could be reached by the current residential visiting model.
14. The Clayfields House aspect of the contract has been generally working well, however it too will be reviewed with the relevant Clayfields’ staff and the specification for the future secure advocacy service revised.
15. Beyond simply the number and frequency of advocate visits to Nottinghamshire’s Looked After young people, consideration will also be given to improving the sharing of “soft” information gathered by advocates on these visits. This will aid understanding of the issues raised by our young people about their experience of the care system and will be a valuable resource for future care commissioning, both internal and external.

### **Other Options Considered**

16. The report is for noting only.

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

17. The report is for noting only.

### **Statutory and Policy Implications**

18. 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.

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

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### **Constitutional Comments**

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

### **Financial Comments (TMR 14/02/17)**

20. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

### **Background Papers and Published Documents**

None.

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

All.

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