

**7 March 2016****Agenda Item: 8****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 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 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.
5. NYAS employs sessional advocates and, as a national organisation, is able to use staff from other regions where these are based closer to Nottinghamshire's young people. There are currently nine fully trained advocates working with Nottinghamshire young people.
6. There is additional provision, which can be spot-purchased, for young people involved in safeguarding processes and who may need support so their views can be heard in the conference or review conference; or who need advocacy in relation to other services such as special educational needs and disability (SEND) processes. There is currently a low take up for this service in the County.

7. NYAS has maintained 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 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 their data and ensure young people are all receiving the service. Over the last quarter 113 visits were made by NYAS to Nottinghamshire young people in residential settings and 58 young people were seen.
8. In addition to the residential visiting advocacy, NYAS undertakes issues based advocacy when they represent young people with specific issues. During Quarter 3 the number of referrals for an advocate received by NYAS was 14. Requests may be 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. NYAS currently has 16 open cases of issue based advocacy for Nottinghamshire young people.
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. An advocate has been into Clayfields House each week during the last quarter and 29 young people have been seen by the advocate in private and had the opportunity to express views on their care.
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 continues to recruit and train volunteers. At the end of Quarter 3, three more volunteers had completed training taking the number of fully trained Independent Visitors to 7. There are currently 4 Nottinghamshire young people children matched and another nine awaiting a match with the newly trained volunteers. There has been a substantial increase this last quarter in the number of people contacting the service to express an interest in volunteering to be an Independent Visitor.

### **Progress of contract**

11. The transition of the contract between the previous provider and NYAS, whilst in theory involving the same group of staff/volunteers moving between employers, resulted in the loss of some experienced workers. This left a shortfall in the organisations personnel and recruitment of sessional advocates, independent visitors and a project coordinator has been slower than anticipated.
12. A particular difficulty in monitoring performance has been the reconciliation of data provided by NYAS in respect of service delivery in the different aspects of the contract. NYAS has now amended their own data collection system to reflect not just the advocate visit to the young person but also the purpose of that visit (a residential advocacy visit as

opposed to an issue based advocacy visit for example) in line with contract expectations.

13. The Clayfields House aspect of the contract has been generally working well, however recently there was a delay in NYAS producing an evaluation of the feedback they take from exit interviews with young people who have been resident at Clayfields. The evaluation is used to demonstrate to Ofsted, regulatory visitors and placing authorities the work done by Clayfields. This matter was resolved and the evaluation completed.
14. Beyond simply the number and frequency of advocate visits to Nottinghamshire's Looked After young people, there is a move to improve the sharing of "soft" information gathered on these visits and improve understanding of the issues raised by our young people about their experience of the care system.
15. Current reasons for young people requesting the help of an advocate include wanting a change of social worker, wanting help and support to make their feelings clear in a Looked After Review, being unhappy at the rules in their care placement and challenging their care plan in terms of decisions about where they live or what family they see for contact. The advocate will work with the professionals involved to make sure the views of the young person are heard, understood and addressed in an appropriate manner.
16. The latest quarterly performance monitoring meeting was held on 3 February 2016. At this meeting the latest data for all aspects of the contract was reviewed and the figures in this report are taken from this meeting.

### **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.

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**Constitutional Comments**

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

**Financial Comments (SS 10/02/16)**

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.

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