

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date: Tuesday 24 January 2023 (commencing at 2:00pm)

Membership:

Persons absent are marked with an 'Ap' (apologies given) or 'Ab' (where apologies have not been sent). Substitute members are marked with a 'S'.

County Councillors

Sinead Anderson (Chair)
Anne Callaghan BEM
Francis Purdue-Horan
Ap Sam Smith
S Tracey Taylor

County Council Officers

Amanda Collinson - Service Director for Care, Help and Protection
Laurence Jones - Service Director for Commissioning and Resources
Ap Devon Allen - Group Manager for Regulated Services
Sophie Eadsforth - Group Manager for Looked After Children
Claire Sampson - Group Manager for Safeguarding, Assurance and Improvement
Jon Hawketts - Group Manager for Commissioning
Charles Savage - Head of the Virtual School

Substitute Members

Tracey Taylor for Sam Smith

Officers and colleagues in attendance:

Beverley Cordon - Senior HR Business Partner
Adrian Mann - Democratic Services Officer
Philippa Milbourne - Business Support Administrator

1. Changes to Membership

The Panel noted that Councillor Francis Purdue-Horan has been appointed to the Panel in place of Councillor Debbie Darby.

2. Apologies for Absence

Devon Allen
Sam Smith

3. Declarations of Interests

No declarations of interests were made.

4. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting held on 24 October 2022, having been circulated to all Members, were taken as read and were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

5. Foster Carers Liaison Group Update

Sophie Eadsforth, Group Manager for Looked After Children, provided an update on the Foster Carers Liaison Group (FLAG). The following points were discussed:

- a) The FLAG meets on a quarterly basis to enable foster carers to engage with Council officers and members, ask questions, consider specific topics in depth and share good news stories. The most recent meeting was positive, following the Council's increase of the foster carer's allowance to bring its offer in line with that of Derby City Council. Ultimately, it is intended to achieve alignment of the allowance across the whole D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership area, to seek to reduce inter-competition for foster carers between the East Midlands local authorities.
- b) Discussions will be held with the FLAG on the nomination of one of its members to attend the future meetings of the Panel on a regular basis, to provide a direct update from foster carers.

Resolved (2023/001):

- 1) To note the update on the Foster Carers Liaison Group and confirm that no additional actions are required in relation to the points raised.

6. Children in Care Council Update

Laurence Jones, Service Director for Commissioning and Resources, provided an update on the Children in Care Council (CiCC). The following points were discussed:

- a) It is vital that as many routes as possible are open to children in care so that their voice can be heard strongly by the Council. To help support this engagement, the Chair of the CiCC has been asked if they would like to attend future meetings of the Panel on a regular basis, to provide a direct update from children in care.

Resolved (2023/002):

- 1) To note the update on the Children in Care Council and confirm that no additional actions are required in relation to the points raised.

7. The Experiences and Progress of Children in Care and Care Leavers

Amanda Collinson, Service Director for Care, Help and Protection, presented a report on the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers. The following points were discussed:

- a) A self-evaluation process has been completed to set out the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers, and to identify the areas of challenge and where improvement is required.
- b) There were 950 children in care in Nottinghamshire as of November 2022, which is lower than the national average. However, there has been a significant increase in the number of children aged over 16 entering the Council's care, which is more than double the rate seen in 2017/18 and 2018/19. The number of unaccompanied children seeking asylum has also risen.
- c) An increased proportion of children have been placed 'out of County' in directly neighbouring local authority areas, or 'at a distance', meaning that they could be a long way from Nottinghamshire. Around 290 of 1,000 children are placed outside of the D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership area currently, but every effort is made to ensure that this is only done either to meet a specific need that can only be met outside the area, or to ensure safety. Work is carried out with the other local authorities within the D2N2 area to ensure that most care needs can be met locally.
- d) A multi-disciplinary approach for children in supported accommodation is in place to respond effectively to growing complex care needs. A Sufficiency Strategy is also being produced to ensure that needs are met locally with good quality placements close to home, wherever possible. The development of the Strategy is ongoing and will involve input from members through the Scrutiny process.
- e) The proportion of children in care achieving a 9-4 passing grade in English and Maths is 23.4%, which is below the regional average. All children in care have a personal education plan in place that includes learning support to help achieve the right destinations for Years 12 and 13, and children have access to support structures for developing the key skills and abilities that they need to help them manage in independent living.
- f) The primary challenge for ensuring sufficient fostering places is being able to recruit and retain the required number of local foster carers, especially during the current cost of living crisis. The foster carer's allowance has been increased and the Council is exploring additional collaborative ways of recruiting foster carers across the D2N2 area. Scoping work is also underway to establish what support foster carers need to be able to provide the best care.

- g) A dedicated kinship support service has been implemented and work is taking place to ensure that kinship carers have robust support plans that are reviewed regularly, so that support can always be accessed regardless of the child's legal status. Consideration is also being given to ensuring that kinship carers have access to a sufficient allowance.
- h) In terms of growing adoption numbers, work is being carried out to achieve a changing culture, embed best practice and ensure that transitions are managed well, and measures are in place to recruit and retain staff in the Permanence teams to deliver this work effectively. The number of adoptions decreased during the Coronavirus pandemic, so a great deal of partnership work has been done across the D2N2 area to support and develop adoption services going forward.
- i) There were 318 care leavers in Nottinghamshire at the end of November 2022, representing an increase of 86 from same period in the previous year. Nottinghamshire has a higher than average proportion of care leavers in semi-independent transitional accommodation and in 'staying put' arrangements, and the cost of living crisis has increased the challenges for care leavers moving into fully independent living. Dedicated mental health support for transitioning children with complex needs is in place, in addition to support for young people to sustain healthy relationships and stay in touch with key contacts after they have left residential accommodation.

Resolved (2023/003):

- 1) To note the report on the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers and confirm that no additional actions are required in relation to its contents.

8. Staffing in Nottinghamshire Children's Residential Homes

Laurence Jones, Service Director for Commissioning and Resources, presented a report on the staffing position in the Council's children's residential homes. The following points were discussed:

- a) Measures are in place to ensure that there are enough staff in the sector to meet the needs of the Council's children in care in residential homes. The overall position is challenging and there can be a requirement for provision to be met through current staff carrying out extra shifts, or through the use of agency staff – while at the same time trying to ensure that children are able to have a consistent relationship with their carers. However, there is no immediate risk of any home needing to close due to a shortage of staff.
- b) A good employment package is in place for staff working in residential homes, with clear opportunities for career progression. This has given staff a good level of job satisfaction and it is intended to publicise this offer further as part of driving recruitment, to ensure that the right staff are in place and that they are able to develop effectively.

- c) New legislative requirements for staff to engage in professional development, with an increased focus on regulation and care standards, and achieve a vocational qualification has been challenging for some long-term members of staff. Most of these staff are able to engage with the practical training elements successfully, but many of the long-term workers started in the sector with very few formal qualifications – and certain basic qualifications are required before members of staff can complete their vocational diplomas. As a consequence, there are some experienced staff who feel unable or unwilling to achieve the required vocational diploma, so discussions are underway with Ofsted to ensure that these people do not leave the workforce unnecessarily.

Resolved (2023/004):

- 1) To note the report on the staffing position in the Council's children's residential homes and confirm that no additional actions are required in relation to its contents.

9. Ofsted and Independent Visitor Findings in Nottinghamshire Children's Residential Homes

Laurence Jones, Service Director for Commissioning and Resources, presented a report summarising the latest Ofsted inspection activity and the key findings of the independent Regulation 44 visits to the children's residential homes operated by the Council. The following points were discussed:

- a) The Ofsted inspection reports are published, but do not publicly identify the home or its location, for the purposes of privacy and safeguarding. The Regulation 44 reports are not published as they identify specific children and their needs, and the names and locations of homes. As such, the report represents a summary of the latest inspection findings, any general issues arising and the work being actioned to address any recommendations.
- b) The current report concerns the residential homes either operated by the Council or by an external provider for the Council's sole use. A performance dashboard for the other homes operated by external providers is being produced. Externally commissioned placements can be used in an emergency or when no other appropriate options are available. Work is carried out to ensure that block contracts with external providers are in place as part of the D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership's framework for collaborative commissioning.
- c) All children in care have a personal Care Plan irrespective of whether they are in an internal or an external placement, and there is close engagement carried out with the external providers to ensure that the needs identified in the Plan are met. Currently, the Council is working with a growing number of providers spread across a wider geographical area. Children are only placed externally in homes rated as 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted. However, sourcing these placements can be challenging in the current context in the sector, so additional scrutiny is applied to external homes when required.

- d) The Panel observed that the elected members are the corporate parents for all children in the Council's care and have a collective responsibility for their care and wellbeing, wherever they might be placed. Members considered that, as such, the Panel must be provided with the relevant information to ensure that it can carry out proper oversight and assurance for all children in the Council's care, within the public domain.
- e) The Panel noted that the short breaks homes in particular have some very good facilities that could, if appropriate and achievable within the regulatory requirements, be used to support other children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities during the school day.

Resolved (2023/005):

- 1) To note the report on the latest Ofsted inspection activity and the key findings of the independent Regulation 44 visits to the children's residential homes operated by the Council.
- 2) To request that the Panel also receives the equivalent performance information for all homes where children in the Council's care are resident, as part of the regular reporting and assurance process.

10. Elected Member Visits to Nottinghamshire Children's Residential Homes

Laurence Jones, Service Director for Commissioning and Resources, presented a report on the framework for members to plan visits to both the Council-run children's residential homes and those homes run by external providers for the sole use of the Council. The following points were discussed:

- a) A proposed regular schedule of visits by Councillors to the Council's children's residential homes has been produced, so that dates can be set. Each Service Director has a personal link to a given home, and visits will be accompanied by appropriate officers.
- b) The visits will be announced and will take place when the children are home. The latest Ofsted and Regulation 44 reports will be provided ahead of the visit taking place. Councillors will have access to the appropriate training before carrying out visits, including on how to complete the associated visit pro-forma and how to engage effectively with non-verbal children. Initially, the visits will be carried out by Councillors who are members of the Panel, but it is hoped that, as all Councillors are corporate parents, other members may wish to be involved in visits in the future.
- c) The Panel considered that it is important that all Councillors are made aware of the work being carried out by the Panel, given that all members have a role as corporate parents. Members noted that the Panel met in public and, as such, its business and the minutes of its meetings are published and forwarded to all Councillors. However, the Panel requested that specific briefings are made available to all Councillors on their corporate parenting responsibilities, and that at least one session is carried out in the first half of 2023.

Resolved (2023/006):

- 1) To agree that a programme of visits by members is scheduled for the coming 12 months to both the Council-run children's residential homes and those homes run by external providers for the sole use of the Council, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.
- 2) To request that specific briefings are made available to all Councillors on their corporate parenting responsibilities, and that at least one session is carried out in the first half of 2023.

11. Government Response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care

Amanda Collinson, Service Director for Care, Help and Protection, provided an update on the Government's response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care (IRCSS). The following points were discussed:

- a) The Government's formal response to the findings of the IRCSS is expected shortly. Once the response has been published, a report will be brought to the Panel to set out any implications arising for the Council in its role as a Corporate Parent and to establish any resulting, ongoing regular reporting and monitoring requirements.

Resolved (2023/007):

- 1) To agree that, following the publication of the Government's response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, a report will be brought to the Panel to set out any implications arising for the Council in its role as a Corporate Parent and to establish any resulting, ongoing regular reporting and monitoring requirements.

12. Work Programme

Laurence Jones, Service Director for Commissioning and Resources, presented the Panel's current Work Programme. The following points were discussed:

- a) The Local Government Association has a published guidance document on '[10 questions to ask if you're scrutinising services for looked after children](#)', and it is intended to ensure that the Panel's overall programme of work will enable the review and discussion of each of these ten themes.
- b) Once the Government's formal response to the findings of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care has been published, a report will be brought to the Panel to set out any implications arising for the Council in its role as a Corporate Parent and any resulting, ongoing regular reporting and monitoring requirements will be added to the Work Programme.

Resolved (2023/008):

- 1) To note the Work Programme, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

There being no further business, the Chair closed the meeting at 3:07pm.

Chair: