



# Scrutiny Report

## People Scrutiny Panel

### Corporate Parenting and Services for Looked After Children and Young People

September 2012





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# FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN



**Councillor Jean Bromby**  
Chairman of the People Scrutiny Panel.

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This short report was produced by the former People Scrutiny Panel to fulfil the recommendations of a twelve month revisit.

We have spoken to many of the children and young people who are in the care of North Lincolnshire Council. It is so important that we listen to what they have to tell us. They want to do something interesting and useful - it is up to us to encourage them and help them to fulfil their potential, to aim for independence, education and above all their wellbeing.

We have visited officers at their workplaces and discussed their views and ambitions for the future.

It is clear from the recent Ofsted / Care Quality Commission report that outcomes for our looked after children and young people are far better than average, but we have far to go - more to achieve - and we must never be complacent.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## **Recommendation 1**

The panel is aware that work is still required to ensure that all sections of the council are fully engaged with the Corporate Parenting Pledge. The panel therefore recommends that the council ensures that each Directorate, section and team within the authority are fully committed to the Corporate Parenting Pledge, and are acting on the responsibilities that arise from this in a co-ordinated manner.

## **Recommendation 2**

Through the Children's Trust Board, the panel further recommends that all identified external partners are also supported to fully commit to the Corporate Parenting Pledge, and are acting on the responsibilities that arise from this in a co-ordinated manner.

## **Recommendation 3**

The panel recommends that the council, in co-operation with its partners, commits to a long-term vision of supporting young people to live independently, instead of instilling dependency. The levels of independence will naturally vary according to the young person's specific circumstances, but maximum independence should be the overarching aim.

## **Recommendation 4**

The panel recommends that the Director for People should present a short report on any required actions arising from recent CQC / Ofsted reports into safeguarding and looked after children, and fostering, to the People Scrutiny Panel by December 2012.

# FINDINGS

## Context

When children and young people cannot be cared for by their parents, families or guardians, the responsibility passes to the local authority to accommodate them. This is known as acting as a 'Corporate Parent' and it occurs with all children and young people who are in the care of the local authority. As the name implies, the responsibility falls to the authority as a whole, working with its partner agencies, and not just Children's Services, ensuring that the child or young person can thrive and make the most of their potential; in short, to seek the same outcomes that any good parent would want for their own child.

Despite this, both nationally and internationally, children and young people in care are often at a significant disadvantage to their peers, with those who have left care far more likely to:

- be unemployed and with poor educational attainment,
- experience poor mental and physical health,
- be involved in crime,
- to misuse drugs and alcohol, and
- to become a teenage parent.

## Local Situation

North Lincolnshire Council normally has responsibility for around 170 children and young people in accommodation, plus around 90 care leavers. A small number (normally around 10) live in the authority's children's homes, and around 30 are placed outside of North Lincolnshire for a variety of reasons. In

recent years, the council has put great efforts into increasing the number of adoptive and foster parents, and this has led to a marked improvement in the number of children and young people in foster care, with an associated decrease in the use of children's homes. North Lincolnshire is the region-wide lead for adoptions. The stock of children's homes has recently been reviewed and reduced, and, at the council's Annual General Meeting in May 2012 it was announced that a new children's campus would be funded.

## Accommodation

The council provides accommodation support and advice to those leaving care, or young people who are unable to return to their families. The service has recently been modernised, and provides appropriate accommodation, support and guidance to young people. The service has access to a range of supported lodgings and housing, independent flats and houses and emergency accommodation, plus there is an effective young parents unit based in Scunthorpe. The service has access to a social worker, and is based at the Young People's Support Centre on the outskirts of Scunthorpe. This centre operates on a drop-in basis, with a multitude of activities and opportunities available to the young people, plus a Children in Care Council helps officers to work with the young people to provide the best possible services.

## Children's Homes

Like many other places, North Lincolnshire has reduced its stock of children's homes in recent times. It is widely acknowledged that

these facilities are often not conducive to good outcomes for all young people, although it is likely that they will be the preferred option for a limited number of people. The council retains some provision in the area, and the proposed Children’s Campus is intended to modernise and provide more appropriate support for these young people. As services develop, it may be possible to use the existing infrastructure to provide additional services for children and young people with specific needs, and to allow them to meet and socialise with their peers.

### Children Leaving Care

The council has a duty to continue to provide support and guidance to those leaving care, whilst also acknowledging that the young person is moving into adulthood and will wish to become more independent and self-supported. A recent inspection by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission highlighted excellent examples of the majority of care leavers being supported into further and

higher education or employment, and the council provides suitable accommodation to all care leavers.

The Ofsted / Care Quality report rated the services on the following criteria of how well the council and its partners provide positive outcomes for children in care and care leavers.

The report states that “Children and young people including care leavers, spoken to by inspectors, reported how well they are supported to lead healthy lives”, which echoes the views of members of the panel when they also spoke to children and young people at the Young People’s Support Centre.

### Outcomes for Local Children and Young People

The majority of outcomes for children and young people in care are good, with some outstanding, and the trend is improving. Some key indicators are listed on the following page, with regional and national averages to enable comparison.

### How good are outcomes for looked after children and care leavers?

Overall	Outstanding
Capacity to Improve	Outstanding
Being healthy	Outstanding
Staying safe	Outstanding
Enjoying and achieving	Good
Making a positive contribution, including user engagement	Outstanding
Economic well-being	Good
Quality of provision	Outstanding

Indicator description	North Lincolnshire Performance (latest figures)	Statistical Neighbours average	National average
Children in care for 1+ year achieving 5 GCSEs at A*-C.	30%	13%	12.8%
Care leavers (age 19) in suitable accommodation	93.3%	87.4%	90%
Care leavers (age 19) in education, employment or training	80%	63.3%	61%
Children in care per 10,000 population under 18	49.9	60.3	59
Children in care in foster placement or placed for adoption	82.8%	81.3%	82.1%
Children in care for +1 year with an annual health assessment and teeth check	94.4%	86.3%	86.5%

### Children Who Go Missing From Care

A recent report from two All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) highlighted disturbing evidence of some children that have gone missing from care, and have subsequently found themselves the victim of many forms of exploitation. Encouragingly, the recent Ofsted report found that, locally “Excellent systems are in place to track, monitor and evaluate cases to ensure that children are appropriately safeguarded in their placements” and that “Arrangements for managing and monitoring children missing from care are extremely good.”

Of particular concern to the APPGs were children who were placed outside of their local area, who were often more likely to go missing from care. Again, local results from the Ofsted Inspection were that “Outstanding commissioning arrangements are in place for the monitoring of safeguarding in out of area placements”. This includes excellent links with the police, information sharing protocols, and schemes to prevent grooming and sexual exploitation.

**Recommendations from the Review of Corporate Parenting Undertaken by the Former Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel.**

In September 2010, the Former Children and

Young People Scrutiny Panel conducted a review into the operation of corporate parenting by the council and its partners. The panel made 12 recommendations, which are listed below, with progress and commentary.

Recommendation	Commentary / Progress
1. It is not evident that all elected members and senior officers are kept up to date with information about looked after children in North Lincolnshire. The panel would, therefore, like to see arrangements put into place which regularly update members and officers in particular with information concerning their wards and looked after children and young people.	The Newsletter (UPD8, The Lowdown) is now published regularly and is forwarded to the Elected Members support team for distribution to members. This gives details of events, activities and developments involving children in care and care leavers in North Lincolnshire. The on-going training programme for elected members also continues and provides information on children in care.
2. Along with receiving information about looked after children and young people in their wards etc. elected members and officers require more information and opportunities to explore their role as corporate parents by attending events or speaking to young people. Regular bulletins should be issued to all members updating them of developments and key messages.	The newsletters are available at all Corporate Parenting events and meetings detailing events and activities. Information is also provided for Elected Members as part of the notification of the training/induction events scheduled as part of the EM training calendar. The children's homes manager contact the local ward member to invite them to the homes. These visits have taken place and further contacts/visits will continue.
3. It is evident that there is some good work being carried out across certain service areas. However, a mechanism needs to be put in place to ensure that all pledges are being reviewed, and that an audit trail is put in place to ensure that the actions in the pledges are carried out.	All areas of the council and a number of partner agencies signed up to the revised overall CP Pledge at the event on 18/02/2011. Senior Officers and partners also provide updates via the Children in Care Strategy Group and Corporate Parenting Group (CPG) regarding actions they have taken as Corporate Parents. The Children in Care Strategy group will continue to monitor Corporate Parenting actions and activities.

Recommendation	Commentary / Progress
<p>4. The Corporate Parenting Group carries out a great deal of work. However, the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services must ensure that this work gets filtered through to the wider sphere of members outside of the Children and Young People Service area.</p>	<p>In addition to the information above, training/induction/information sessions are regularly provided for new and existing Elected Members as part of the on-going Elected Members training programme</p>
<p>5. That more formal corporate visits be arranged that are pencilled in the calendars of the children’s homes. This would inform the children of when members are arriving in order for them to be able to chat if they wish to do so.</p>	<p>Further discussion via the CPG and through the Corporate Parenting Training with Elected Members identified that a number of Elected Members wished their visits to be unannounced. Members are provided with their visiting schedule in advance and are invited to visit by arrangement should they wish or visit unannounced.</p> <p>Proposals were also taken to Cabinet that the homes display the name of the Elected Member visiting each month to enable the young people to make contact should they wish.</p> <p>This has now been actioned and the details of the member rota’d to visit each month displayed in the home.</p>
<p>6. The panel would like to see a piece of work carried out to make sure we are doing everything as a council to make sure that looked after children and young people General Practitioner records are transferred in a timely manner.</p>	<p>All children’s cases have been reviewed and they have an identified GP.</p> <p>The Health Lead within the Corporate Parent Group has been asked to ensure the records are transferred as appropriate.</p>
<p>7. Looked after children and young people are not always aware of elected members’ roles, responsibilities and the assistance they can provide. A leaflet should be developed and distributed to all looked after children and young people and care leavers explaining the role of members as their ‘corporate parents’ with their contact details and dates of their surgeries.</p>	<p>The leaflet has been distributed to children in care and care leavers. It was designed and worked on by the Children in Care Council to develop child/young person friendly versions. As part of this, the Garage Patch Kidz group also worked on the leaflet to ensure it is child friendly.</p>

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Commentary / Progress</b>
8. That all elected members undertake mandatory training on their corporate parenting role, with refresher courses held every three years. The corporate parenting training should also be a compulsory part of any new member or senior officer's induction package.	All elected members have received corporate parenting training in the last three municipal years, with the exception of 10 members, who have opportunities for training in the near future.
9. That briefings/seminars on the corporate parenting role should be scheduled into the member development programme for North Lincolnshire Council..	This is now embedded in the member development programme, with regular sessions for elected members.
10. That the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel be kept informed of progress made with regards to the Virtual School team currently being established.	A briefing report will be submitted to the People Scrutiny Panel as appropriate.
11. That this review be revisited in 12 months time.	This short report constitutes the revisit of the review.
12. That everyone involved throughout this review be thanked for their participation and contribution.	Witnesses and participants were routinely thanked throughout the original review, and were formally acknowledged in the report.

# CONCLUSIONS

It is clear to the panel that corporate parenting and services for children and young people in care are performing very well locally, and should act as a model of best practice for others. The recent Ofsted / Care Quality Commission report into safeguarding and looked after children services placed North Lincolnshire amongst the very best in the country, with a majority of findings rated as 'outstanding', and the rest rated as good – only two in the country at the time, with over 130 inspections carried out. We await formal publication of a similar report on fostering services.

There are a small number of relatively minor improvement actions where progress is well underway. These focused on ensuring the excellent practice and recording observed by the inspectors continues to be achieved consistently. Following the inspection, further training, the further development of quality assurance processes and reflective practice has been a key focus of the development of services. The panel is confident that these recommendations will be achieved in the coming months. We have asked for an update, with appropriate evidence, by the end of the year.

The panel has made a small number of recommendations to assist with these improvement actions, outlined on page 4.



