

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – 19 SEPTEMBER 2016

Title of paper:	NYAS Advocacy and Independent Visitor (IV) Service – Nottingham Residential Visiting	
Director(s)/ Corporate Director(s):	Helen Blackman – Director, Children’s Integrated Services	Wards affected: All
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Other colleagues who have provided input:	Senior Advocate, NYAS IV co-ordinator, NYAS Salaried Advocate	
Date of consultation with Portfolio Holder(s) (if relevant)		
Relevant Council Plan Key Theme:		
Strategic Regeneration and Development		<input type="checkbox"/>
Schools		<input type="checkbox"/>
Planning and Housing		<input type="checkbox"/>
Community Services		<input type="checkbox"/>
Energy, Sustainability and Customer		<input type="checkbox"/>
Jobs, Growth and Transport		<input type="checkbox"/>
Adults, Health and Community Sector		<input type="checkbox"/>
Children, Early Intervention and Early Years		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Leisure and Culture		<input type="checkbox"/>
Resources and Neighbourhood Regeneration		<input type="checkbox"/>
Summary of issues (including benefits to citizens/service users):		
<p>This report summarises the activities undertaken to date of the Advocacy and Independent Visitor (IV) services provided by the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) during the year 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016.</p> <p>The report will also highlight the benefits of providing good quality advocacy and IV services and this contributes to safeguarding and improving outcomes for young people.</p> <p>An appendix to this report is exempt from publication under paragraphs 1 and 2 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 because it contains information relating to personal data which could be used in the public arena to identify an individual and, having regard to all the circumstances, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest to disclose this information. It is not in the public interest to disclose this information because it may compromise the safeguarding measures implemented by the local authority and partner organisations when protecting children and young people in care.</p>		
Recommendation(s):		
1	To acknowledge the Advocacy and Independent Visitor activities being undertaken by NYAS.	
2	To recognise the importance of the Advocacy and Independent Visitor Services in	

1. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 To acknowledge the Advocacy and Independent Visitor activities being undertaken by NYAS.

It is important to ensure that the Corporate Parenting Board (the Board) has an understanding of the Authority's children in care Advocacy and Independent Visitor (IV) arrangements and the activities being undertaken to ensure the best quality provision is being delivered. Ensuring the Board has a thorough understanding of what NYAS, as providers of these services, are contracted to deliver and the work being conducted to deliver these services, will place the Board in a position to better scrutinise the quality of Advocacy and IV provision.

1.2 To recognise the importance of the Advocacy and Independent Visitor Services in safeguarding and helping children in care to get their views heard.

Children in care have a right to have their wishes and views concerning their care heard. Ensuring that this happens improves the child's experience of care, which in turn promotes positive outcomes for them in the future.

Independent Advocates play a vital role in ensuring that the wishes and feelings of looked after children are listened to and considered when making decisions that affect their care.

2. BACKGROUND (INCLUDING OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION)

2.1 The role of the Independent Visitor was first introduced as a statutory service for looked after children in the Children Act 1989. Nottingham City commission the provision of this Service to NYAS, and the Residential Service Manager for Children in Care is responsible for overseeing this contract. Nationally, research suggests that the importance of this role is under-recognised. For example, the Children's Rights Director reported that 80% of children who did not have an independent visitor said this was because they were never offered one. Independent visitor networks and key stakeholders have been calling for increased awareness and improved consistency across local authorities.

NYAS was awarded the contract to provide Advocacy services and Independent Visiting services commencing 1st April 2014. The Service was awarded following a competitive tendering process. Prior to 1st April, 2014, the service was delivered by Barnardo's.

The Commissioned Service provides –

2.2 ISSUE BASED ADVOCACY

- An issue-based Advocacy Service for all eligible Children and Young people.
- Advice and information for children and young people about their rights, including those contained in Sections 17 and 26a of the Children Act 1989, the Children Act 2004 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

This Service is for children and young people up to the age of eighteen years, looked-

after now or in the past, or up to twenty five for those with a disability or in higher education. This includes children and young people who are in short-term placements, in secure placements and those in out of county placements.

The number of children and young people who can receive support from an Advocate is dependent of the contract budget.

2.3 INDEPENDENT PERSONS SERVICE

This Service is for all eligible children and young people subject to current Secure Accommodation Orders, and provides Independent Persons for secure accommodation review panels as specified under the current Statutory Regulations. (Section 25 Children Act 1989, Children (Secure Accommodation) Regulations 1991, Children (Secure Accommodation) Amendment Regulations 1992).

2.4 INDEPENDENT VISITOR SERVICE

This Service provides suitable appointed volunteers to visit any child or young person who is looked-after where it is deemed to be in the child or young person's best interests, in accordance with s47 The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. This includes children placed out of the Local Authority area. The Children Act 1989, Schedule 2 Para. 17 states a key criterion for those suitable for service: 'that communication or visits between the young person and a parent of hers/his or, any person who has parental responsibility for the young person, has been infrequent or non-existent during the last twelve months'. The Children and Young Person Act 2008 broadens the criteria, to include those young people for whom it is deemed to be in their "best interests" to have an Independent Visitor.

There is no cap of the number of looked after children and young people who can be referred to the service for an Independent Visitor. Therefore all looked after children and young people can be offered an IV if it is felt it is in their best interests. The IV Service is provided up to the age of 18.

2.5 RESIDENTIAL VISITING ADVOCACY SERVICE

This Service provides visits to all Children & Young People's residential children's homes and residential schools, whether provided by the Local Authority or an independent provider where a looked after child from Nottingham City is placed. This is to include those placements outside the City of Nottingham or the County of Nottinghamshire. Children and young people are entitled to a bi-monthly visit from a visiting Advocate.

2.6 SPOT PURCHASE

NYAS provides an Independent Advocacy Service for the following children and young people on a spot purchase referral basis. They include those who are-

- At risk of exclusion from school or have been permanently excluded.
- Involved in an Initial/Review Child Protection Conference.
- Referred by the Youth Offending Team/Service.
- Placed in a residential setting by Council Educational Services or from an SEN disability tribunal.
- Deemed to be in need of this Service.

2.7 SERVICE TRANSFER

NYAS utilised the services of independent advocates from other contracts to ensure that the most vulnerable young people were prioritised, and received services whilst the Service was being transferred from Barnardo's to NYAS in 2014.

2.8 STAFF TEAM

The staff team is made up of a Service Manager, a Senior Advocate and an IV Co-ordinator. The contract is overseen by the Service Manager - Midlands. In addition, NYAS currently has 17 independent advocates, with a further 4 currently awaiting training. We are continuing with a programme of recruitment and have 4 further candidates to interview in the near future.

2.9 PROGRESS TO DATE

Independent visitor service

NYAS have continued working hard to maintain the Independent Visiting service by; supporting current volunteers, recruiting new volunteers, delivering independent visiting training and supporting volunteers through their workbook.

This is a national issue and a useful document to consult is ***The National Independent Visitor Data Report January 2016*** – some of the key findings from this report were:

Key findings

- There are around **2,200** children currently matched with an Independent Visitor – **3.2%** of the total looked after children (LAC) population in England.
- There are currently **over 1000 children** on a waiting list for an IV; the data shows over two thirds of Local Authorities have a waiting list.
- **8 Local Authorities in England** responded that they do not have an IV Service.
- **5 Local Authorities** operate solely on a spot purchase basis.
- **38 Local Authorities** reported funding IV matches beyond 18 years old; the data shows that in these Local Authorities, there were around 130 Care Leavers benefiting from this. However many more relationships continue informally without funding. Four Local Authorities told us that they have officially extended their provision in line with the Leaving Care Act.
- **104 Local Authorities** contract out their IV Service to external organisations; **32 Local Authorities** provide their IV Service 'in-house'.
- **40%** of matches have known each other for at least 2 years.
- On average there are around **14 matches** per Service across England.

Volunteer Support

All volunteers receive support from the IV Co-ordinator over the phone and via e-mail to ensure they are fully informed of any updates and changes in the Service. The IV Co-ordinator has delivered one to one support to volunteers who are unable to attend

any of the volunteer meetings. The IV Co-ordinator continues to offer newly matched volunteers with support, by offering a checking in an out system during their first few visits. Volunteers meetings have taken place where best practice is shared, including activity ideas and opportunities for additional positive activities which are paid for by NYAS.

Looking forward into the next year

The new Service Manager and IV Co-ordinator will be meeting with key individuals within the Local Authority to look at some partnership work, This includes the Head of Service, Service Manager, for Children In Care, Head of the IRO Team which will reduce the number of referrals that are closed due to NYAS not receiving the necessary referral and Health & Safety forms.

The NYAS team will visit the children and Social Care Teams to promote the services and provide information packs. Explain the service delivery and the importance of completing the necessary referral forms.

Children and Young People waiting to be matched will be offered the opportunity to participate in interviews, Art workshops and other local and national NYAS participation work.

Advocacy Service

Referrals are received through our national helpline and passed through to the Local Co-ordinator for allocation. Advocates have been sourced from out of county contracts. NYAS normally allocates each case within 24 hours, and the Advocate makes contact with the child or young person within 72 hours.

17 NYAS self-employed Advocates supported children and young people nationally.

Looking forward into the next year

The focus will be to increase the number of Advocacy referrals by disseminating the referral information across all Social Care Teams. The NYAS Team will visit the Teams and internal homes to promote the services and provide information packs. Explain the service delivery and answer any questions.

Children and Young People also will be offered the opportunity to participate in interviews and other local and national NYAS participation work.

Children and Young People will be made of the Children in Care Council and all will be encouraged to share their views through the 'Have Your Say Survey' including those matched with an IV, receiving Advocacy support and visiting residential advocacy.

Looking forward into the next year

The focus of the coming year is to increase the number of residential visits that are undertaken. The increase in self-employed Advocates will address this. NYAS promotional leaflets and posters will be disseminated across all residential homes and information of how to make a referral. The Service Manager and teams will link in with Homes' Managers and in some instances will visit the Home especially those with

additional needs increase awareness of the support NYAS can offer by using non-instructive Advocacy approach.

Children and Young People will be encouraged to feedback on the service they receive from NYAS, verbally, via feedback cards and forms.

3 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED IN MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 None.

4 FINANCE COMMENTS (INCLUDING IMPLICATIONS AND VALUE FOR MONEY/VAT)

4.1 The combined (City and County) contract has a value of –

1. Year 1. As per contractual agreement
2. Year 2. As per contractual agreement
3. Year 3. As per contractual agreement

4.2 In addition, further costs will be incurred through the spot purchase arrangement. These are invoiced regularly to allow for close budget monitoring.

5 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT COMMENTS (INCLUDING RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES, AND LEGAL, CRIME AND DISORDER ACT AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS)

5.1 The Service ensures that the wishes and feelings of looked after young people are considered when planning for their futures. Risk to the Local Authority is therefore reduced and managed, as concerns and complaints are supported and effectively managed. Vulnerable children and young people are further supported through the residential visiting advocacy and the Independent Visiting Service, with particular focus on minimising isolation and maintaining contact with the young person.

6 STRATEGIC ASSETS & PROPERTY COMMENTS (FOR DECISION RELATING TO ALL PROPERTY ASSETS AND ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE) (AREA COMMITTEE REPORTS ONLY)

6.1 None.

7 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 Has the equality impact of the proposals in this report been assessed?

No



An EIA is not required because:

(Please explain why an EIA is not necessary)

Not needed as the report does not contain proposals or financial decisions.

Yes



Attached as Appendix x, and due regard will be given to any implications identified in it.

8 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS OTHER THAN PUBLISHED WORKS OR THOSE DISCLOSING CONFIDENTIAL OR EXEMPT INFORMATION

8.1 None.

9 PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO IN COMPILING THIS REPORT

9.1 The National Independent Visitor Data Report, January 2016.

9.2 The Children Act, 1989.