

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – SEPTEMBER 2017

Title of paper:	Advocacy and Independent Visitor Service Annual Report	
Director(s)/ Corporate Director(s):	Helen Blackman – Director, Children’s Integrated Services	Wards affected: All
Report author(s) and contact details:	Valerie Marshall – NYAS Service Manager, Midlands valerie.marshall@nyas.net	
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 2016 to 31st March 2017.</p> <p>The report will also highlight the benefits of providing good quality advocacy and IV services and how this contributes to safeguarding and improving outcomes for young people.</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 safeguarding and helping children in care to get their views heard.	

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 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.

Independent Visitor visit young people in care every month, this regular contact with them ensure any concerns are identified. They can attend the young person's LAC Review and support them to refer to the advocacy helpline.

2 BACKGROUND (INCLUDING OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION)

2.1 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 Barnardos. The contract is being extended for 6 months until the end of September 2017

The commissioned service provides –

2.3 ISSUE BASED ADVOCACY

- 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.

2.4 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)

2.5 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.

2.6 RESIDENTIAL VISITING ADVOCACY SERVICE

This service provides visits to all Children and 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 or a Nottinghamshire County is placed. This includes those placements outside the City of Nottingham or the County of Nottinghamshire.

2.7 RESIDENTIAL VISITING ADVOCACY SERVICE TO SECURE ACCOMMODATION

This service provides residential visiting advocacy to Clayfields House in Stapleford on a weekly basis.

2.8 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

2.9 SERVICE TRANSFER

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

2.10 STAFF TEAM

The staff team is made up of a Service Manager, a Senior Advocate, a Salaried Advocate and an IV co-ordinator. The contract is overseen by the Service Manager - Midlands. In addition, NYAS currently has 21 independent advocates

2.11 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. There has been increase of volunteers applying to NYAS to become Independent Visitors in Q4.

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-ordinators continue to offer newly matched volunteer support, by offering a checking in an out system during their first few visits.

4 Volunteers meetings have taken place where best practice is shared, including an activity ideas and opportunities for additional positive activities newsletter which are paid for by NYAS. Volunteers have also attended safeguarding training.

The Service Manager and IV co-ordinator have met with key individuals within the local authority and provide regular updates on the progression of the recruitment of volunteers. This has included the Head of Service, Service Manager for Children in Care, Residential Home Managers and attendance at the foster carer's meetings.

In some circumstances there have been delays to NYAS receiving the necessary referral and Health & safety forms and we are not always informed when a new Social Worker has been allocated. The Service Manager for Children in Care has been supported NYAS to address this.

Looking forward into the next 6 months

The IV co-ordinator will continue to focus on recruitment and meeting with the children and young people referred to ensure the most suitable match takes place. The volunteers currently going through different stages of recruitment will be interviewed within 2 weeks and trained within 3 to 4 weeks and, once references have been received and verified, will be signed off and matched.

Children and Young People waiting to be matched will be given a voucher from NYAS additional positive activity funds.

The IV Co-ordinator will provide additional funding to support additional visits for those matched. This is an extra visit that will be to a particular place chosen by the young person and agreed with the Social Worker.

Advocacy Service

Referrals are received through our national helpline and passed through to the local co-ordinator for allocation. NYAS introduced an online referral procedure for Professionals and also developed and launched an Advocacy app. Advocates have been sourced from NYAS 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.

There has been an increase in the number of advocacy referrals from April 2016 to March 2017. NYAS has implemented an outcome framework which includes a pre and post questionnaire to measure the journey and experience of the advocacy support. Children and young people have said they feel supported and empowered by the advocacy support and understands their Rights more.

28 NYAS self-employed advocates supported children and young people from Nottingham City who are placed in out of County placements across England and Wales over the last year

RESIDENTIAL VISITING

There has been a significant increase in the number of residential visits over the last year. The Service Manager has quality assured all services and has linked in with other leads within NYAS and identified advocates for those placed a distance from the Local Authority. More local advocates have been successfully recruited and are now working. The Service Manager and teams have linked in with Homes' Managers and in some instances have visited the Home and Teams to raise awareness of the services. Promotional material has been provided including information about how a referral can be made.

There is a barrier to visiting young people in semi-independence settings as often they move or they do not wish to engage in the 8 weekly visits. NYAS are not always provided with accurate updates on the movement of young people. The Service Manager has raised this with the City Commissioners at the quarterly monitoring meeting and work will be undertaken to improve this moving forward.

In addition, Clayfields House has received weekly visits during the reporting year in line with contractual requirements. NYAS has supported young people in secure accommodation reviews, most of which taken place some distance from Nottingham City. Local NYAS independent persons have supported these young people.

3 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED IN MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 None.

4 FINANCE COLLEAGUE 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. Year 4. As per contractual agreement extension 30th September 2017

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 COLLEAGUE 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. The residential visiting service that is for all Nottingham City children and young people place in or out of County, across England and Wales is an extra safeguarding service for those placed away from Nottingham City as they are visited at least every 8 weeks.

6 STRATEGIC ASSETS & PROPERTY COLLEAGUE 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 required 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 None.