

Report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services to the meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel to be held on 20 January 2020

O

Subject:

Children's Rights & Advocacy Services

Summary statement:

Report overview regarding the independent advocacy service that enables children and young people to be supported and heard in matters that affect them.

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Portfolio:

Children and Families

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Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Children's Services

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) are commissioned to provide independent advocacy and support to children and young people for them to be heard and for them to understand and be empowered to exercise their rights.
- 1.2 The independent advocacy provided falls into three categories –
- Advice and guidance on rights
 - Support with regular meetings
 - Support to make a complaint

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 NYAS are commissioned to provide the following services –
- Independent advocacy to children and young people who are in the care of Bradford MD Council either on a Care Order (full or interim) or via Section 20 (voluntarily accommodated) of The Children Act 1989.
 - Provide Independent Visitors for Children in Care. An Independent Visitor (IV) is an adult volunteer who befriends and develops a long-term friendship with a young person in care. This can involve helping young people develop new interests, skills and hobbies or going on outings such as to the cinema, bowling or just a walk in the park. The volunteers are called 'Independent Visitors' because they are a truly 'independent' person outside the care system giving the young person continuity, which is something not always possible with changing carers and social workers.
 - Provide support to children over the age of 8 to participate in the Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC).
 - Support to young people experiencing homelessness.
- 2.5 Return to care interviews after children have been missing are undertaken by Advocacy Focus.
- 2.6 The reporting period for this report is February 2019 to present.

Independent Visitors

- 2.7 NYAS are commissioned to provide 30 matches for children in care in Bradford. Since February 2019, the service has received 13 new referrals for Independent Visitors; 7 new matches have been made. In total, 26 children are receiving support from an Independent Visitor; 11 children are waiting to be matched to a suitable volunteer.
- 2.8 NYAS has continued to recruit good volunteers who meet the needs of our children in care. Volunteers are recruited through a variety of promotions including the use of the council website and posters in local community resources such as libraries, coffee shops and cafes.
- 2.9 Children's experiences highlight that they have found that the service has been invaluable with regards to developing confidence, supporting them at times when other changes are happening and supporting activities that have promoted good

outcomes. At times the Independent Visitor has been the only consistent factor in a child's life; this has been highlighted as an important form of source especially when children are experiencing changes in placements and social workers.

- 2.10 The challenges identified by the service relate to improving communication with frontline services to ensure that Independent Visitors are updated regarding any changes in the child's life to ensure that involvement is effective and appropriate to meet the needs of the child.

Advocacy

- 2.11 The following table shows the referrals for this reporting period for advocacy which is either related to a specific issue or complaint.

Reporting period 2019 to 2020	Feb –	May –	Aug –	Nov –
	Apr	Jul	Oct	Jan
	2019	2019	2019	2020
	Qu1	Qu2	Qu3	Qu4
Number of new referrals	26	17	23	
Number of individual Young People (YP) represented	32	50	46	
Number of acknowledgements made to YP within 2 working days	26	17	23	
Number of YP met within 1 week	26	17	23	
Number of YP waiting for advocacy	0	0	0	
Number of on-going cases	32	23	29	
Number of referrals closed	23	27	16	
Number of referrals where YP satisfied with service received - closed cases	23	27	11	
Number of referrals OOA (Out of LA area placements)	9	20	22	
Inappropriate referrals	0	0	1	

- 2.12. The most common theme raised was with respect to the placement due to location or because the child was unhappy in their current placement. Other significant issues raised were in relation to contact arrangements, wishes and feelings regarding care planning and requests for change in social workers. Information from NYAS highlights that children have engaged well with services resulting in closure of referrals. However a large proportion of referrals remain open due to the significant issues identified and often there being a delay in resolving issues.

- 2.13 One of the most significant issues raised was regarding the response to complaints made by children; the process is highlighted as lengthy resulting in children often disengaging. This leaves children feeling that they have not been listened to or engaged in a meaningful way to resolve matters that are important to them.

- 2.14 NYAS have also highlighted that improved communication with frontline services

would assist with seeking quick resolution. The issue of staff turnover has been identified as a significant issue; changes in managers have also impacted attendance at the quarterly meetings. It has now been agreed that moving forward the Head of Service, Safeguarding Reviewing and Quality Assurance will chair the meetings and ensure that the membership is representative of the necessary services linked with NYAS. At a meeting with NYAS last week, a new escalation and resolution process was agreed to promote improved responses to issues identified.

Child Protection Service

2.15 The following table shows the referrals for children to be supported to partake in their ICPC for this reporting period.

Reporting period	2019/20 ICPC				Total	
	Feb - Apr	May - Jul	Aug - Oct	Nov - Jan		
	Qu1	Qu2	Qu3	Qu4		
Number of new referrals		69	34		Total	103
Number of individual Young People represented		48	35		Total	83
Number of acknowledgements made to YP within 2 working days		69	34		Total	103
Number of YP met within 1 week		48	35		Total	83
Number of YP waiting for advocacy		0	0			
Number of on-going cases		9	10			
Number of referrals closed		60	29		Total	89
Number of referrals where YP satisfied with service received - closed cases		39	25		Total	64
Inappropriate referrals		4	2		Total	6

2.16 Out of the 103 children referred to the service, 83 children have been represented. 20 children have refused the service or have chosen not to engage with the advocacy service. Further information is required to understand why children chose not to participate in the Child Protection process.

2.17 When children have engaged with the advocacy service, feedback provided highlights that this has been positive. Children have been supported to attend the meeting or an advocate has attended on their behalf to ensure that their voice is present in the ICPC. This has enabled participation and helped children to feel that they have been listened to. Conference chairs have highlighted that the attendance of an advocate is appreciated and valued to support the process being child centred.

2.18 NYAS has reported that the service is being used well, with Bradford having a higher take up than other authorities. This has been successful due to the referral process being effective with all the relevant details.

- 2.19 To strengthen the service further it was identified that it was important to revisit raising the profile of NYAS being available to support children in ICPC; it is necessary that social workers discuss the advocacy service when a decision has been made to proceed to an ICPC with the child and parents so that consent can be made for NYAS to be involved.
- 2.20 To continue to enable effective child participation and attendance, exploration is also required to the development of child friendly plans, linking this to how meetings are managed to enable the child to attend the whole meeting when appropriate, rather than being left alone in a room or in reception. Discussions are also required with our partners to address some of their reluctance at times to having children attend the conference.
- 2.20 Due to the positive feedback about the service, it would be helpful to consider whether there is any scope to extend this service to review conferences to support a child centred service.

Youth Homelessness

2.21 The following table shows the referrals for this reporting period from Youth Homelessness.

Reporting period	2019/20 YH				Total	
	Feb - Apr	May - Jul	Aug - Oct	Nov - Jan		
	Qu1	Qu2	Qu3	Qu4		
Number of new referrals		6	9		Total	15
Number of individual Young People represented		6	8		Total	14
Number of acknowledgements made to YP within 2 working days		6	9		Total	15
Number of YP met within 1 week		6	8		Total	14
Number of YP waiting for advocacy		0	0			
Number of on-going cases		2	8			
Number of referrals closed		4	7		Total	11
Number of referrals where YP satisfied with service received - closed cases		4	3		Total	7
Number of referrals OOA (Out of LA area placements)		0	0		Total	0
Inappropriate referrals		0	0		Total	0

- 2.22 All of the 15 referrals made to support young people experiencing homelessness have been in relation to rights and entitlements. There is a low rate of referrals from this part of the service and further discussions are required to understand this.
- 2.23. When the service has been used, the feedback provided highlights that it has been effective in resolving issues. One of the challenges to supporting young people

experiencing homelessness is being able to maintain contact with the young person.

Promotion and Networking

- 2.24 **Children and Young people** - All young people who have received a visit have been given information leaflets about NYAS and how to contact the Helpline. More recently children are being informed about the free NYAS App they can download.
- 2.25 **Children's Services** - NYAS have attended a number of team meetings to raise awareness about the service, including the Through Care Teams, IRO Team and CCHDT. NYAS have attended open day events and conferences to promote the service. This is a continuous process and it has been agreed that this will be revisited after the restructure. NYAS are also exploring which other services need to be informed of the service with the wider community to develop partnership working.
- 2.26 NYAS would like to develop a drop in facility at Sir Henry Mitchell House one day a week where Social Workers and Team Managers will have access to the Senior Advocate to make enquires, discuss cases and make referrals. This will be implemented after the restructure.
- 2.27 **Children In Care Council** - NYAS have attended the CICC and introduced the service to the children and young people who attend. It has been agreed that a drop in session once per month would be available to support more children and young people to access the Advocacy service if they wanted too. Dates and arrangements for this need to be planned and made available.

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 None

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

- 4.1 N/A

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

- 5.1 N/A

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

- 6.1 N/A

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

- 7.1.1 It is critical that the feedback and issues raised by children are listened to and

considered to ensure that the service is effective in supporting good outcomes.

7.2 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

N/A

7.3 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

N/A

7.4 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

N/A

7.5 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

N/A

7.6 TRADE UNION

N/A

7.7 WARD IMPLICATIONS

N/A

7.8 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS (for reports to Area Committees only)

N/A

7.9 IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING

7.9.1 Challenging and strengthening services to improve outcomes for Looked After children.

7.10 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

N/A

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

N/A

9. OPTIONS

9.1 There is clear evidence that NYAS are supporting services by enabling child participation. It is a core service that needs to be strengthened with an understanding of how this provision can be developed to enable effective service provision for the children of Bradford.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 That it be noted that NYAS complete an annual report with more detail regarding ethnicity and age range for each of the areas that they are commissioned to provide a service for. It has been agreed that this will be included in the data that they provide on a quarterly basis. This will help enhance the understanding of how well our services support and enable children.
- 10.2 That the recommendations in appendix 1 to Document "O" be considered and a further report be provided to the panel with an update regarding progress against the actions identified.

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 List of actions – appendix 1.

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 12.1 None

List of Actions to improve Child Participation across the service

Independent Visitors
Social workers to be reminded to update Independent visitors regarding any changes that happen to better meet the needs of children; this will also support improved communication.
To support the recruitment of volunteers through providing a venue to facilitate training as well as social workers / managers being available to sit on interview panels.
Look at capacity to commission a further 10 places to support a wider range of children.
Advocacy and Complaints
Review of complaint services for Children and Young People; timeliness needs to be reviewed to ensure that there are no delays in resolving issues – this will reassure children and young people that we are listening to them.
Renewed engagement with frontline services further to the restructure to raise aware of the advocacy service available for children.
Appropriate representation at quarterly meetings with NYAS.
Review of escalation and resolution process to consider effectiveness in responding to issues raised by children.
Child Protection
Further understanding of the data when children have made the choice to not engage with the service to look at how participation can be increased.
Promote the advocacy service with teams to ensure that children and families are aware of the service and can give consent for a referral to be made.
Develop and promote child friendly plans to promote enable children to better understanding of what is happening and what decisions are being made.
Review the format of meetings to support child participation and work with partner agencies to understand their concerns regarding children attending the conference.
Further exploration is required as to whether there is any scope to extend this service to review conferences to support a child centred service.
Youth Homelessness
There is a low rate of referrals from this part of the service and further exploration is required to understand this. Information about NYAS needs to be shared with relevant services in the Bradford area.