What do we know?

Summary

We know that Looked after Children are a particularly vulnerable group and are at high risk of social exclusion, health inequalities, and poor educational attainment. Although many looked after children do well across all of these areas, there is significant evidence that they do less well than their peers.

The NICE guidance on Looked after Children issued in April 2013 confirms the need for this group of children to have:

- Stable placements which promote the young person's sense of identity and self-esteem;
- Dedicated services to promote mental health and well-being;
- Effective health assessments and treatment, twice yearly for children under five and annually for all others.

In addition, the Local Authority has specific duties:

- To promote and safeguard the welfare of Looked After Children;
- To listen to the wishes and feelings of children before making a decision that is important in their lives;
- To promote the educational attainment;
- To regularly review the needs and circumstances of all children Looked After;
- To continue to support young people after they have left care.

Facts and figures

The proportion of children Looked After in Lincolnshire has increased in 2012/13 but remains lower than in other comparative authorities in England. 42.8 compared with 59 per 10,000. Actual numbers of LAC have grown by 83, from 500 in March 2012 to 583 at the end of March 2013.

The age profile of Looked after Children was 22% between the ages of 0-2, the majority of whom were subject to care proceedings – 29% were aged 14+.
In 2013, the proportion of LAC placed in foster care was 490/583 or 87%.

To meet the needs of a small number of LAC some placements have to be made with independent agencies, which accounts for 4.4% of the Looked After total in Lincolnshire and was 21 individuals at the end of March 2013.

**Trends**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of children looked after at 31 March who had been looked after for at least 12 months</th>
<th>Number of children whose immunisations were up to date</th>
<th>Number of children who had their teeth checked by a dentist</th>
<th>Number of children who had their annual health assessment</th>
<th>Number of children who had been looked after for at least 12 months, and aged 5 or younger at 31 March 2013</th>
<th>Number of these children whose development assessments were up to date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENGLAND</td>
<td>47,200</td>
<td>39,270</td>
<td>38,720</td>
<td>41,200</td>
<td>9,420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAST MIDLANDS</td>
<td>3,300</td>
<td>2,750</td>
<td>2,460</td>
<td>2,630</td>
<td>720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincolnshire</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table LA6: Health care and development assessments of children who have been looked after continuously for at least 12 months

Years: 2013

Lincolnshire JSNA: Looked After Children (LAC)

Targets

10,000 young people leave care in England each year aged between 16-18 years old. They leave home at a younger age and have more abrupt transitions to adulthood than their peers. Unlike their peers who normally remain in the family home, care leavers will often be living independently at age 18. Information from the children right's Directors survey on care leavers and Children in Care Council (CICC) meetings show that many care leavers feel that they leave care too early (care leaver's strategy, October 2013).

Care leavers can struggle to cope and this can lead to social exclusion, long term unemployment or involvement in crime. For example 34% of all care leavers nationally were not in education, employment and training (NEET) at age 18 in 2013 compared to 15.5% of 18 years olds in the general population.

There are approximately 306 young people in Lincolnshire receiving a leaving care service from Barnardo’s who are commissioned to deliver this service on behalf on the Local authority. All eligible and relevant young people are allocated a leaving care worker and have a needs assessment and pathway plan setting out support they will receive throughout the transition into adulthood. No young people will be discharged from the looked after system unless this is consistent with their needs and after robust assessment. Over the past two years significant work has taken place to improve suitable accommodation for care leavers in Lincolnshire. A further priority for Lincolnshire is improving the number of young people in Education, Employment and Training.

Lincolnshire Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mar-12</th>
<th>Mar-13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPs in Suitable Accommodation</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPs in EET</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Performance

Lincolnshire’s performance reflects strong partnership working with an emphasis on prevention through the development of Targeted Services and the families Working Together project. It also reflects Lincolnshire's strong emphasis on placing children and young people with friends and family and ensuring that when it is safe and appropriate to do so, children are exited from care and placed back with parents of family members.
What is this telling us?

Summary

Data shows that following high profile cases, such as Baby P, that there is a greater awareness of signs of abuse and neglect and that LAC numbers have risen as a result. This appears to be reflected within the LAC population in Lincolnshire.

Despite the increase in numbers of LAC, 87% of children are placed in foster care within the county with only 21 placed with Independent Fostering Agencies. Recruitment of carers has remained steady, but has been challenged by a reduction in retention rates. Lincolnshire is currently subject to a Department For Education review of foster carers’ recruitment in order to assist us with our recruitment and retention strategy. This will be particularly important in ensuring a sufficient supply and choice of placements. The response to this has been to:

- Plan initial placements through the weekly support panels and reduce the need for emergency placements.
- To ensure that services (Placement Support Workers, Family Support, CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service), Education, Health) work together more effectively targeted and co-ordinated to support carers.
- To review each case defined as permanent to ensure that support to carers is agreed and regular
- To improve communication with Looked After Children based on the Pledge and "What I want from my social worker" agreement.

Looked After Children leave home far earlier than their peers. In partnership with Barnardo’s, District Councils and the Fostering Service, a youth housing strategy is being developed. This has been in recognition of the need to provide safe and suitable housing for all young people including Care Leavers. Lincolnshire, as a result, has been able to provide a more comprehensive choice of accommodation and currently, there are 30 young people within Staying Put foster placements (post 18) and 40 in supportive lodgings. This is offering better choice but is something that needs to develop further in order to meet the needs of more care leavers. The current percentage of young people in suitable accommodation is 88% which is marginally below the target of 90%.
Local views

On-going consultation and engagement with LAC and stake holders happens on a regular basis via these channels

- CYPSP Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership
- BIG conversation
- Takeover day
- V4C
- Tell Us surveys
- voluntary and community sector as a review panel

Whilst it is accepted and understood that there is a need to consult with LAC there is a danger we engage too much with a relatively small group.

National and local strategies

Current activity and services

Education

Education attainment of Looked After Children is significantly below that of their peers in Lincolnshire. The gap between the attainment of Looked After children and their peers is too great and considerable individual work with children is undertaken at all key stages in order to narrow the gap. Additional challenges in respect of attainment faced by looked after children, relate to a history of disrupted education and a higher ratio of children with special educational needs.

In order to support looked after children each child has a designated teacher and has access to tailored educational support via payment of the Pupil Premium. In addition, extra tuition and support is made available.

In 2013, the breakdown for attainment of 5 GCSEs A* to C, including English and Mathematics, was:

- All children National 58.6%
- All East Midlands 58.7%
Lincolnshire JSNA: Looked After Children (LAC)

- All children Lincolnshire 61.6%
- LAC national 15.3%
- LAC Lincolnshire 16.2%

**Employment Education and Training**

The number of all care leavers who are NEET (not in employment, education or training) is an area of significant work in Lincolnshire. Over the past 2 years it has remained disappointingly low at 63%. At a time of challenging employment prospects for young people care leavers require additional preparation to manage the transition into employment. Individual plans are created for each care leaver in order to maximise their potential to progress in the areas of employment and training. The Leaving Care service operates a successful apprenticeship programme and works closely with employers and training institutions to develop programmes that enhance employability and confidence.

**Accommodation**

Looked After Child leave home far earlier than their peers. Care leavers are a vulnerable group of young adults who have particular needs in relation to housing and homelessness. Demands on social housing and other type’s accommodation to meet the complex needs of care leavers needing accommodation is increasing.

**Offending behaviour and custody**

Young people who have been in care can be particularly vulnerable as they transition into adulthood, particularly if they are in the criminal justice system. They are also a particularly vulnerable group that are at risk of being drawn into crime. Equally we know care leavers can be particularly vulnerable to becoming a victim of crime, including in some cases falling victim to grooming and exploitation online or offline.

**Lincolnshire Figures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Sep-12 Number</th>
<th>Sep-12 %</th>
<th>Sep-13 Number</th>
<th>Sep-13 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Custody</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CAMHS

LCC is the lead commissioner for child and adolescent mental health services. The purpose of the service is to improve the mental health and well-being of children and young people in Lincolnshire, with a focus on prevention and early intervention and in particular providing an enhanced service to Looked After Children, Care Leavers and those in or on the cusp of the Youth Justice System. The maximum wait from receipt of a referral to the Looked After service in CAMHs is no longer than 4 weeks.

NI058 is the National Indicator which measures emotional wellbeing of children, more commonly known as the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). The SDQ enables early identification of children and Young People, requiring support due to their emotional and behavioural difficulties. In Lincolnshire, we have reviewed and updated a care pathway that involves Children’s Services, Applied Psychology services and CAMHs to ensure that social workers are able to access advice and guidance, once the need for support is identified. Children and Young People with high scores are referred to the multi-agency SDQ review group for advice and monitoring.

In 2012/13, our mean average in Lincolnshire SDQ score was 14, which indicates that the majority of Looked after Children are emotionally settled and stable.

Key inequalities

Evidence shows that Care leavers share many of the same health risks and problems as their peers but often to a greater degree. They have often endured greater challenges within their own families with physical, emotional and psychological difficulties in their lives. As outline in the NICE Quality Standards for the Health and Wellbeing of Looked After Children and Care Leavers (2013), Care leavers are vulnerable to a range of poor health outcomes and inequalities in accessing services and often enter the care system with a worse level of health than their peers (No health without mental health, February 2011). Lincolnshire County Council works with CAMHS to have a full time mental health worker which bridges the gap between Children and adult services.

Changes in the statutory responsibility of the County Council in relation to public health presents new opportunities for provision of services to tackle health inequalities and to improve outcomes for children Looked After.

Young people who have been in care can be particularly vulnerable as they transition into adulthood, particularly if they are in the criminal justice system. They are also a particularly vulnerable group that are at risk of being drawn into crime. Equally we know care leavers can be particularly vulnerable to becoming a victim of crime, including in some cases falling victim to grooming and exploitation online or offline. Lincolnshire leaving care service are working the Child Sexual exploitation steering group to ensure care leavers are
Lincolnshire JSNA: Looked After Children (LAC)

considered as a vulnerable group and any service or interventions that are developed consider their needs. All prevention services need to consider the risk care leavers have become involved in criminal justice system due to health issues, being NEET etc.

Key gaps in knowledge and services

The service needs to ensure the development of health data collection for Looked after Children from the Public Health intelligence team. This will improve the health profile of this group in Lincolnshire.

Risks of not doing something

Understanding the health needs of Looked After Children enables specific services to be commissioned to address any areas of concern and supports children in managing their individual health needs proactively.

What is coming on the horizon?

The health pathway for care leavers and looked after children is being reviewed in light of the 2013 Care Quality Commission inspection to ensure that resources are utilised to optimal effect

What should we be doing next?

The process for health assessment requires review to ensure a timely response to all required assessments. All care leavers require personal health information via a Health passport to enable them to manage their own health needs.