

MINUTES OF MEETING

Meeting	FLAG Meeting	
Date and time	04/10/2021	
Location	Teams Meeting	
Attendees	<p>Rachel Cutts (Chairperson)</p> <p>Steve Edwards – Service Director</p> <p>Councillor Sinead Anderson – V/C Children and Young People’s Committee</p> <p>Penny Hannah – FSO (Minute Taker)</p> <p>Debbie Ratcliffe – SSW</p> <p>Laura Webster – FIRO</p> <p>Sue Denholm – Assistant Head of Virtual School</p> <p>Stephanie Pritchard – Assistant Head of Virtual School,</p> <p>Joanne Mathieson – Senior Practitioner Quality & Improvement</p> <p>8 Fostering Households attended</p>	
Apologies	Sophie Eadsforth, Ty Yousaf and Jill McLaughlin	
Agenda	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Financial Position 2. Guest speaker/Visitor 3. Service Update Children’s Services 4. Carers Concerns and Matters arising 5. AOB 6. Date of Next Meeting 	
Previous Minutes and updates		Action
<p>Rachel Cutts (Chairperson) opened the meeting and introduced herself. There were 8 fostering households in attendance and a round of introductions was made.</p> <p>Previous minutes read. There is some outstanding action from the previous minutes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A newly approved FC shared that she had felt isolated in the period following approval and the possibility of routinely setting up a newly approved FC with a buddy was discussed. Action – Ty to look at the process for newly approved carers with team managers and see what teams do in terms of “buddying up” new carers. Create a policy to ensure this is done for each new fostering household. 		<p>Update needed from Ty Yousaf</p>

- A carer asked if adoptive parents are given training in relation to the role of the foster carer in the adoption process **Action** – Sophie to speak with adoption manager Shelagh Mitchell to share this feedback re adopters

Update from Sophie (this info was previously shared in the August Edition of the Fostering Newsletter following the last FLAG meeting.)

Shelagh Mitchell, group manager for East Midlands Adoption, has confirmed that adoptive parents are given training around this and encouraged foster carers to come forward should they wish to be involved with further development of this training i.e. contributing to a short video or compiling a do's and don'ts list. If you would like to contribute in some way then please email Sophie Eadsforth: sophie.eadsforth@nottscc.gov.uk

- IRO Jill McLaughlin asked a question in relation to savings accounts for looked after children. **Action** – Sophie to ask Matt Wesson/Rachel Stimson about this

Update from Sophie (this info was previously shared in the August Edition of the Fostering Newsletter following the last FLAG meeting.)

Matt Wesson and Rachel Stimson, CSMs for the Looked after and Leaving Care Services have explained that it is not easy setting up a bank account for a child as the carer has to set the bank account up in their name and then it is difficult to transfer the account to a new carer. Instead they have been encouraging carers to set up a Share Foundation ISA -details can be found here - [Make a contribution — The Share Foundation](#)

Further information about the Share Foundation can be found on the government website - [Child Trust Fund: Accounts for children in care - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Agenda Items

1. Financial Position

It is not possible to have an update on the financial position as there is currently no Treasurer for the committee. Steve Edwards suggested discussing this at AOB.

2. Guest speaker/Visitor

Sue Denholm and Steph Pritchard from the Virtual School

Sue gave an overview on the work of the Virtual School. This is a service of the LA governed by the statutory guidance 'Promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children 3 to 18 years'. They take a collaborative approach working in partnership with all services and agencies.

There are 5 FTE Achievement Officers who work in a locality-based way and have responsibility for liaising over PEPS. They focus on PEPs for the children they are most concerned about i.e. those not achieving, not meeting milestones, school placement at risk or transitions.

There has recently been a revamp of the PEP making it more strength based, more target based for educational outcomes and age and phase appropriate. There have been some major improvements centred around the child's voice. We know some children don't want to go to the PEP, so the FC is key to ensuring their voice is heard. If the FC can't attend the designated teacher in the school should go. PEPs take place three times a year, one per term.

There is now a dedicated website for Foster and Residential Carers which is very informative and should answer a lot of the frequently asked questions – the link is below

[Foster and Residential carers | Nottinghamshire County Council](#)

Part of the website is dedicated to schools and all the latest forms and guidance are on there.

Some FC are concerned that some schools do not know how to deal with children who may have additional emotional needs due to trauma and attachment. Virtual School offers training around this and other matters specific to looked after children to schools

Pupil Premium – Steph Pritchard

Steph gave an overview of Pupil Premium. An amount of £2000 per statutory school age looked after child is paid to the school in the Autumn Term. Schools use the funds based on data around progress and attainment and should be academic where possible and approved by Virtual School. This should routinely be discussed as part of the PEP

A further amount of £345 per child is reserved by Virtual School to pay for the multi-modal project and home tutoring for children who cannot currently attend school.

Further details about this can be found on the new website.

Questions/Comments

Q: Does support continue after 18?

A: After 18 it looks different as the PEP would become an employability PEP if this was needed.

Q: Can Virtual School direct how the Pupil Premium is spent/ Do schools give examples of how this is spent?

A: Virtual School works collaboratively with schools giving advice and guidance and can retain the premium if there are concerns.

Q: This info could benefit new FC – could something be put in place?

A: Virtual School has a slot at the post approval training but would be willing to work with the service on something for pre-approval

Q: What would you suggest if FC doesn't think it is being spent appropriately or not to meet the child's needs.

A: In the first instance ask designated teacher – what are they spending it on and why have they made those decisions. Virtual School can become involved if there is conflict and can link FC with the achievement officer for their area if necessary.

Jo Mathieson – Care Leavers Partnership Strategy 2022-25 (Draft)

Jo is currently working with the partnership responsible for outcomes for LAC and care leavers. The current strategy is coming to an end and the partnership has sought the views of the young people at the heart of it. There was a working group of older looked after children and care leavers and they were asked what matters most to them and things they don't want

- Having a voice and feeling understood by professionals in our lives, and those professionals remaining consistent where possible
- Being and feeling safe, experiencing stability, at home and at school
- Having safe and regular time with our birth family. Remaining in contact with friends, family, others who are important in our lives, including our pets
- Being able to take part in social and extra-curricular activities and celebrations like other children and young people
- Having the time and support to prepare for changes that need to happen and knowing what services and support are available
- Learning 'real-life' skills

They have told us some things that they don't want:

- To have lots of paperwork
- To have to tell our 'story' over and over
- To feel blamed for change and challenges whilst in care or after leaving care, such as placements breaking down

Jo explained that the vision has not changed much from the last one because the messages we are getting from the young people involved are similar

Vision

"We want our children and young people who are care experienced to have every opportunity and the support they need to be the best they possibly can be.

We want our children and young people to have the best start in life and will encourage and promote our children and young people to have resilience, ambition, aspirational goals, and practical and emotional support for their successful journey into adulthood.

We will nurture strong roots of stability, love encouragement, positive relationships, and healing from past harm."

As part of this Jo talked about the four commitments that we make to every looked after child and care leaver:

- We will ensure that your voice is heard and has influence
- We will help you to experience stability as much as possible – at home, at school and in relationships which matter to you
- We will seek to understand and recognise your individual needs
- We will encourage you to dream and be aspirational and ambitious about now and about the future

There will be an online consultation for young people, foster carers, and professionals to provide feedback on this draft. The consultation will last for a period of at least 4 weeks. It is important to get involved and encourage YP to get involved as this is the chance to have a say. The questions will be simple and broad to give freedom for adding information and comments.

Q/A and Comments

FC were concerned about the time when a YP leaves them and goes on to uni. They might still be close geographically, but the young person goes from a lot of input to not very much quickly and this can leave them vulnerable.

Steve Edwards advised that the young person should have a PA from leaving care. FC are concerned that there has been staff leaving that team so there have sometimes been frequent changes of worker which is not ideal.

Action – A link to the online consultation to be shared in the next Fostering Newsletter/ emailed out to all foster carers. Jo will provide the link when it is ready to be shared

Steve said that there is currently work being done with Nottingham and Trent Universities to explore the possibility of having a mentor scheme for care experienced young people at uni.

Steve wondered if it would be beneficial to have a FC on the Partnership board. Sophie Eadsforth represents the service, but it may be helpful to have the view of the FC. The Partnership meets every other month – Rachel Cutts and Laura Redfern are happy to be involved with that.

3. Service Update – Children and Young People’s Services – Steve Edwards

There is some work starting that will look at the children’s social work teams working in a more multi-disciplinary way with some other agencies such as Change Grow Live (who provide support around drug and alcohol abuse) , domestic abuse support, Health and Adult Mental Health Services . Many of our children and young people who are in care or at risk of coming in to care have been exposed to these things.

By April there will be a pilot in the Mansfield/Ashfield area to see if this multi-disciplinary approach can make a difference.

We are considering our approach to older children – particularly the risks they face outside of home, such as knife crime, gangs county lines etc, previously we would not automatically become involved, but this is changing. FC will be aware of the You Know Your Mind personal health budget scheme to support mental health and wellbeing of looked after children. It is thought that there might be a way to incorporate it in this work. A different creative way in working with young people and having conversations around what they need may help, and although there is cost involved this is far outweighed by the benefits of keeping children and young people out of residential care.

During the Pandemic the Youth Service did support with some fostering households/residential units. This was quite successful, and Steve is now working with Youth Service and Leaving Care PAs to do more supporting in the community. There is now a pilot in the Mansfield/Ashfield area – supporting young people and their FC where the placement is at risk of breakdown. The idea is to do some intensive work first and then eventually get them integrated into mainstream activities

Action – Steve to share details of the next meeting with Rachel and Laura

A FC present said they accessed this service and found it positive. Their young person (17) would go off and do activities with the youth worker and would come back relaxed and refreshed which made a difference.

FC present felt that it was sometimes difficult that youth clubs mainly operate during term time and it is needed during holidays also, to maintain some routines, as things often start to go wrong when routines are broken. Steve advised that the service is exploring this.

4. Carers Concerns/Matters Arising

- Rachel reflected on something one of the guest speakers talked about during the conference. A care experienced person who now as an adult remembers that those social workers who had the most positive impact for her were those who took the time to listen and take her and her sibling away from the foster home when they came to visit. Everyone present acknowledged that the children's social workers have a lot of demands on their time, but this is not always happening and feel it would be beneficial for the child/young person. Steve said that getting outside of the home environment is important particularly for safeguarding reasons as they potentially may not feel able to 'open up' at home.
- Some FC have expressed that they would like to go back to face to face meetings for FLAG. In the last FLAG reminder email the Recruitment FSOs asked carers to respond saying what their preference regarding this is. There has been a limited response.

It was suggested that County Hall may be too far for some to travel. PH explained that the rationale behind this is the current availability of the meeting technology that allows us to meet as a blend of attendees in the same room with people also having the option to dial in. This kit is currently only available at County Hall

5. AOB

- Laura Webster FIRO gave an update. Things are getting back to normal regarding annual reviews with some of them taking place face to face now. There is currently a third FIRO (Charelle Francis) on a temporary basis – to be reviewed in March. They have been doing some strengths-based approach training and are now regularly included in manager's meetings so they can provide updates and keep current with any changes.

**Action –
Steve will
feed this
back**

- FC Hubs – nothing much has been happening due to the Pandemic restrictions, but some are arranging to meet up now.
- FC JW asked about funds being available for support groups. The support group she is part of regularly meets and a couple of times a year they all meet to do an activity, so the children and adults get to spend time together. It was confirmed that funds are available, but the FLAG committee currently does not have a Treasurer.
- FC Laura Redfern volunteered to be Treasurer.

6. Next meeting

10 Jan 2022 7.00pm – 8.30pm MS Teams Online