

Committee: **Corporate Parenting Panel**  
Date: **24 July 2009**  
Title of report: **Draft Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Panel**  
By: **Director of Children's Services**  
Purpose of report: **To request the Panel's comments on the draft report before submission to Cabinet.**

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**Recommendation: The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note and endorse the contents for submission to the Cabinet on 23 September 2009.**

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**1. Financial Appraisal**

1.1 The financial implications are included in the Cabinet report attached as Appendix 1

**2. Supporting information**

2.1 The report on the work of the County Council as a corporate parent in 2008/09 is attached as Appendix 2. It covers the Corporate Parenting Panel's remit during the 2008/09 within a more detailed report about the effectiveness of corporate parenting.

**3. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation**

3.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note and endorse the contents for submission to the Cabinet on 23 September 2009.

MATT DUNKLEY  
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Teresa Lavelle-Hill, Head of Service for Looked After Children, Tel: 01323 747197

Local Members: All  
Background documents: None

**Committee:** Cabinet

**Date:** 23 September 2009

**Title of Report:** Report on the work of the County Council as a Corporate Parent, 2008/09

**By:** Director of Children's Services

**Purpose of Report:** To outline progress in corporate parenting in 2008/09

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**Recommendation:** The Cabinet is recommended to approve the report

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## **1. Financial Appraisal**

1.1 The financial implications of implementing Care Matters and the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 continue to be met from the Care Matters grant, together with the Children's Services base budget.

## **2. Supporting Information**

2.1 The report on the work of the County Council as a corporate parent in 2008/09 is attached as Appendix 1. The report examines the many ways in which the County Council's role as corporate parent has been discharged, and includes a summary of progress made by children looked after by the County Council, significant developments in services for these children, as well as the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

## **3. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation**

3.1 The Cabinet is recommended to approve the report.

MATT DUNKLEY  
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Teresa Lavelle-Hill, Head of Service for Looked After Children, Tel: 01323 747197

Local Members: All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: None

**Report on the work of the County Council as a  
Corporate Parent 2008/2009**

## 1 Placement Data

1.1 During 2008/09, the number of children looked after by the County Council increased (by 22). On 31 March 2009, there were 461 looked after children, placed as follows, with 2008 figures in brackets:-

with foster carers	374	(367)
of these: in house carers	258	(272)
kinship carers	61	(47)
agency carers	55	(48)
placed for adoption	27	(12)
in lodgings	5	(3)
in ESCC children's homes	17	(15)
in agency children's homes	7	(5)
in agency special schools	12	(13)
placed with own parents	18	(22)
youth custody/secure unit	1	(2)

1.2 Compared with national figures, East Sussex has a much higher percentage of children fostered.

	<b>East Sussex</b>	<b>England</b>
Fostered	81%	71%
(fostered by friends and family)	13%	8%
Residential Care	8%	14%
Placed with own parents	4%	8%
Other placements	7%	7%

1.3 The number of looked after children has grown steadily since July 2008. This reflects an increase in children subject to child protection plans (from 373 at 1 April 2008 to 479 at 31 March 2009), which resulted in an increase in issuing care proceedings during 2008/09. If this trajectory is maintained, it will have a significant impact on the overall budget for looked after children's placements.

1.4 The main change in 2008/09 was the increase in kinship foster carers, partly as a result of the introduction of the Public Law Outline (PLO). This had created some capacity in the in house provision as at 31 March 2009 snapshot. The increase in agency placements is due to the increase in parent and baby assessment placements in the context of care proceedings. The combination of the changes in the Adoption and Children Act and the PLO means that there is a heavier demand for time limited assessments of young children with their parent(s) in foster placements. Of the 55 placed in agencies, 11 were placed in parent and baby placements. Excluding parent and baby placements, the number of children placed with agency foster carers has remained around 45 throughout 2008-2009.

1.5 The number of children placed for adoption rose in 2008-2009 with a peak of 35 in December 08. As adoption orders have been made, this figure slightly declined towards the end of the year. This fall needs to be set in the context of a national decline in the number of children placed for adoption. This has been influenced by the introduction of special guardianship orders and by the impact of the PLO on court processes. There were 25 children waiting for adoptive placements at the end of March 2009, 11 of whom were in the process of being matched with adoptive families. Proactive family finding was in process for the remainder.

## 2 Performance

2.1 Several key performance indicators continued to improve in 2008/09; and are in the 'very good' or 'good' bands:

Key performance indicator	08/09	07/08	England
% of children with 3 or more placements in the year	5.8%	8.1%	11.4%
% of children leaving care with at least 1 GCSE	75%	74%	47%
% of reviews held on time	94%	91%	Not published yet
% of care leavers aged 19 who are engaged in employment, education or training	67%	66%	64.9%
% of children who had annual health checks and dental checks	90.5%	89%	86.9%
% of care leavers at the age of 19 in suitable accommodation	92%	90%	88.4%
% of children absent from school for more than 25 days	7.3%	9.7%	11.9%

2.2 One other key performance indicator dipped slightly but remained in the 'good' band:

Key performance indicator	08/09	07/08	England
% of children looked after for more than 2 years in stable placements	70.5%	71%	65.7%

2.3 There was a huge improvement in the number of children participating in their reviews:

Key performance indicator	08/09	07/08	England
% of children who communicated their views for each of their reviews	91.6%	80.8%	Not published yet

2.4 The percentage of children adopted during the year reduced to 5.5% (from 11.7% in 2007/08), and this is a cause for concern. Although the cohort is small and, therefore, small changes may appear significant, only 16 children were adopted in 2008/09, the lowest number in the past 10 years. This reflects the sharp fall in the number of children with a care plan for adoption (just 22) in 2007/08. However, there has been an increase to 31 children with a care plan for adoption in 2008/09, so it is likely that the number of adoptions will rise again in 2009/10.

### **3 Inspections**

3.1 The Adoption service inspection in November 08 was judged by Ofsted to be overall 'good', with "outstanding" for Enjoy and Achieve.

3.2 Children's home inspections were judged as follows:

- The Bungalow, Sorrel Drive – outstanding
- Acorns, Dorset Road – outstanding
- Brodrick House – good
- Rose Cottage – good / satisfactory
- Homefield Cottage – good
- Hazel Lodge - good
- Lansdowne Secure Unit – good.

All those with an overall 'good' had 'outstanding' in one or more areas.

### **4 Key developments in 2008/09**

4.1 The educational support for looked after children has been strengthened by the establishment of the Virtual School. A governing body is in place, including representatives from carers and designated teachers, which has met regularly during the year. The core staff of the Virtual School (previously The Education Support Team) has been expanded, and a small room has been established at the Lansdowne Children's Centre. This has enabled individual support to be provided to a number of young people temporarily out of school. This is in addition to the support and advice already available to schools across East Sussex. The Virtual School has also administered the provision of personal education allowances which have provided up to £500 per child of additional support for education-related activities or equipment. More than half the young people in Year 11 were supported with home tutoring through the bursary scheme and most showed significant improvement.

4.2 The fostering service continued to maintain its performance in 2008/09. 20 new foster carers were approved during the year, offering 39 new placements (an increase of 4 compared with the previous year). In addition, 11 foster carers were approved to offer a permanent family placement, either through fostering or special guardianship orders. A member of the Corporate Parenting Panel continues to sit on the Fostering Panel. The service continued its excellent partnership with the East Sussex Foster Care Association. The Foster Care Association worked with the integrated LAC service to enable children in care to attend a residential weekend at "Little Canada" in August 2008. This weekend allowed children in care to spend quality time with their social workers, carers and fostering service staff. Other partnership events included the annual Christmas party and pantomime trip for children and another successful trip to see the X Factor in Brighton. 173 foster carers and staff, along with some elected members, attended the foster carer awards ceremony in September 2008. 51 children in care nominated their foster carers for awards. A number of children and young people had the opportunity to send their own messages to carers, which were shown at the ceremony.

4.3 The placement support service, which is a specialist team within the fostering service, has extended its remit over the year from a 'support to carers' service aimed at preventing placement breakdowns to a service that works directly with children and young people in line with Care Matters. In addition to managing and reviewing 86 packages of support to individual children and their foster families, the service undertook 41 group activities with over 500 places being utilised.

4.4 The placement support service has been key in driving forward the consolidation of the Children In Care Council (CICC) since its first inaugural conference in July 2008. The Children in Care Council meets on a monthly basis and has invited key managers to their meetings including the Virtual Head Teacher, the Deputy Director of Children's Services, and the Heads of Service for Looked After Children, as well as attending Corporate Parenting Panel. The CICC were crucial in drawing up the East Sussex Pledge for Children In Care, which outlines what children in care can expect. The Pledge was approved by Lead Member in March 2009. The CICC involvement ensured that the voices of children in care were listened to and were incorporated into the Pledge. The CICC will continue to "hold us to account" and will be consulted and included in all service developments.

4.5 The Adoption and Permanence Service matched 35 children with adopters during 2008/09. This is a 50% increase on the matching activity levels for 2007/08. The service also matched 15 children with permanent foster carers. 23 new prospective adopters were approved during the year. During the year, 6 special guardianship applications were presented to the Adoption and Permanence Panels (a member of the Corporate Parenting Panel sits on each Panel). Post adoption support continued to be a heavy demand on the service throughout 2008/09. The service worked intensively with 39 families, a number of whom required additional multi agency intervention. This support has been crucial in maintaining children with their adoptive families. In addition, the service supported 77 contacts of which 43 were directly supervised. The service also managed 512 letter box contacts, an increase of 36 from 2007/08.

4.6 The residential strategy delivered through 4 group homes in Seaford, Bexhill, Eastbourne and Hastings was consolidated in 2008/09 with continued improvement in overall performance. The group homes provided high quality care to challenging young people, with most of the children making significant progress. Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel visited the homes regularly throughout the year. East Sussex County Council has been successful in its bid to the DCSF to build a 7 bedded new secure unit at the existing Lansdowne site in Hailsham. A Project Board has been established to take forward the next steps in preparation of detailed plans, planning application, tendering and the actual build.

4.7 Independent scrutiny of the care planning arrangements for all looked after children continues to be provided by Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), who are managed by the children's safeguarding unit. As well as ensuring that children who are looked after need to be so, this service has a duty to ensure that young people are involved in the decision making process through participation in their reviews. Within the review process, IROs monitor progress and quality assure the social work with the children. Quarterly quality assurance reports to senior managers are instrumental in driving up standards for the looked after children's service.

4.8 Over twelve hundred individual reviews were held in the year 2008/09 with 94% of these being held within statutory timescales. This is a marked improvement on previous years and is a result of managerial action taken at the beginning of the year to ensure closer oversight of review cancellations. Some meetings that were held outside timescales were late in order to accommodate individual child or parental needs. The other priority target for 2008/09 was to improve dramatically the rates at which young people in the care of East Sussex County Council contributed in a meaningful way to their looked after review and decision making process. The end of year figures show that, in all but 45 reviews, young

people who were deemed old enough to contribute, did make a positive contribution to the review process. This target has significantly improved from the previous year with over 91% of reviews including a contribution from the young person. Two areas for improvement in 2009/10 are the timing and quality of review documentation sent by social workers to the independent review officer and the quality of initial and review health assessments for looked after children.

4.9 The planned publication in the autumn by the DCSF of statutory guidance arising from the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 will include provisions to regulate and increase the remit of the IROs' role and function. The Safeguarding Unit has, in anticipation of this and other pressures, already increased the staffing complement.

4.10 The range and quality of mental health support to looked after children and their carers continues to be met through the Looked After Children's Mental Health Service (LACMHS) and specialist Child and Mental Health Service (CAMHS). The LACMHS is a multidisciplinary child & adolescent mental health service based with the fostering service in Eastbourne which provides a specialist service for looked after children for whom the plan is permanence. The remit of the service is to contribute to placement stability by providing consultation to, assessment of, and focussed therapeutic work with the looked after child/young person and their carers. In 2008/09, the service worked with 52 children and their carers. In addition, 95 looked after children received a service from specialist CAMHS.

4.11 The contact service, which is countywide, was transferred from the Integrated Children's Service to the Looked After Children's Service in 2008. The service has 18 child and family workers based across the county and is managed by a practice manager. The contact service's main remit is supervision of contact between parent(s), extended families and children, where the child has been removed from the family home and placed either in foster care or in kinship arrangements. The new PLO has placed substantial pressure upon the contact service, with the judiciary frequently ordering five and sometimes seven days contact per week for the child/baby. Further pressure has been the increased demand for large sibling group contact and contact within complex kinship placements. On average for 2008/09 there were 645 contacts per month compared to 400 for 2007/08. Regular meetings with judges in the Family Justice Division have taken place to look at the impact of increased levels of contact and the appropriateness of contact, particularly where the plan for the child is permanence. A key priority for the service is the need to retain staff in order to meet this growing demand and to influence good practice with the judiciary on the frequency and quality of contact.

4.12 In 2002, a circular LAC (2002) 17 was issued, requiring local authorities and police forces to review their systems with regard to children who go missing from care, with annual monitoring of absences from foster placements and residential homes. A 'Joint Protocol for Children Missing from Care 2002' was agreed with Sussex Police. This was reviewed in 2008 and in anticipation of the new Missing from Care and Home Guidance (published end of June 2009), Sussex Police appointed a Missing Person Officer who tracks, intervenes with and monitors those young people who go missing from home or care and is linked to a named officer in the local authority. This is a new project unique to East Sussex, which has attracted local and national interest.

4.13 Currently, the Missing Person Officer and Children Services Managers meet monthly to track and agree action on young people who go missing from care and home, through a multi agency plan. The number of children who go missing from care in East Sussex i.e. those who are persistently missing, either from residential homes or foster care is extremely low. Only 6 looked after children were missing from care in 2008/09. All of these were missing for less than 12 hours, with the majority missing for less than 3 hours. Where there is serious concern for a young person, a multi agency meeting is convened, and police and social workers intervene at an early stage to prevent further escalation. The Missing from Care Home Project

has contributed to an improved response to young people who go missing from home and care. The project is able to track and better manage those young people who put themselves at risk and effectively engage young people in reducing the number of missing from care episodes.

4.14 There are three looked after children's teams, based in Hastings, Lewes and Hailsham. These teams have prime responsibility for all those looked after children where the care plan is permanence outside the birth family. The number of children managed in the LAC teams was 339 as of 31 March 2009. Social workers act as key workers to progress and monitor child care plans. The teams have further responsibility for undertaking proceedings under the PLO. In addition, the LAC teams have prime responsibility under 'Care Matters' for promoting and improving the outcomes for looked after children and young people, especially in health, education and emotional wellbeing. The looked after children teams also continue to support some care leavers, providing consistency in order for them to achieve their ambitions towards higher education or employment.

4.15 Nationally, the most significant development in 2008 was the Children and Young Persons Act which received its royal assent in November 2008. The purpose of the Act is to extend the statutory framework for children in care and to ensure that young people receive high quality care and services that are focused on and tailored to their needs. The main legal requirements are: improving the educational achievement of looked after children by placing designated teachers on a statutory footing; providing assistance for young people to pursue a course of higher education via an annual bursary of £2,000; extending the period that care leavers should receive ongoing support to the age of 25; the setting up of an Independent Review Mechanism for foster carers; re-issuing of the 2002 Health Guidance for Looked After Children, now placing a statutory duty on PCTs with regard to health assessments and health care plans. A Care Matters implementation plan is in place in East Sussex to meet not only the requirements of the new Act but the good practice enshrined in Care Matters. In the spirit of Care Matters, the range of support arrangements and entitlements for care leavers has been revised. The changes enable more care leavers to remain with their foster carers after the age of 18, with some financial assistance to the carers, and a specified package of support for care leavers wishing to go to university. East Sussex is well placed and on track to meet all the legal requirements. As the new Regulations and Guidance are issued, LAC services may need to revise and develop appropriate policies.

## **5 Corporate Parenting Panel**

5.1 The Panel has met quarterly and has continued to take a keen interest in the progress of looked after children and scrutinise the performance of services that support them. During 2008/09 the Panel has received a presentation from East Sussex Foster Care Association and from the Children In Care Council.

5.2 The Corporate Parenting Panel has considered reports on:

- Care Matters and The Children and Young Persons Bill 2007
- Adoption and Permanence Service
- Fostering Service
- Implementation of the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care
- Local Safeguarding Children Board
- The Development of East Sussex Children in Care Council (CICC) and the Pledge for Children in Care
- Educational progress of looked after children
- Care leavers' progress
- Aiming High for Disabled Children – Transforming Short Breaks for Disabled Children

- Development of Family Plus Service
- Implementation of the Children Act 2004 Guidance and Public Law Outline (PLO) guidance - the new approach to care proceedings

5.3 In addition, at each Panel relevant Ofsted inspection reports and the monthly Regulation 33 reports on each children's home (compiled by an off-line manager) are considered as well as statistics on Looked After Children, Residence Orders and Special Guardianship Orders. The members take a keen interest in these detailed reports, which supplement their own knowledge of the children's homes gained through regular visits.

## **6 Conclusion**

6.1 Improvements have continued in 2008/09 in the quality of care looked after children experience and their outcomes. However, much remains to be done, especially in expediting adoptive placements and permanent placements for those children that need them. Although East Sussex Children's Service performs higher in nearly all key performance indicators than the national average, the biggest challenge, as for all local authorities, remains in narrowing the gap in outcomes between looked after children and their peers – in educational attainment and achievement, including accessing higher education, in health, in reducing teenage parenthood, and in making a positive transition into adulthood, all of which remain a priority for LAC services. Other priorities include the consolidation of the contact service and working with partners in health and district and borough councils to encourage them to fulfil their corporate parenting responsibilities. Research shows that the most effective way of improving outcomes is to secure a permanent stable placement throughout childhood. Therefore, continuing to recruit adoptive parents, permanent and short term foster carers and maintaining children in stable placements remain the top priorities for the integrated looked after children's service.