

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 18 January 2013 at County Hall, Lewes

PRESENT: Councillors Hughes, O’Keeffe, Ost, Pragnell, St Pierre, and Stroude (Chair)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Belsey, Lead Member for Children and Families

Liz Rugg, Assistant Director, Children and Families
Teresa Lavelle-Hill, Head of Looked After Children (LAC) Services

Janet Fairless, RHM Brodrick House and Homefield Cottage
Nigel Hewitt, RHM Hazel Lodge and Rose Cottage
Anthony Julyan, Operations Manager, Children’s Disability Services
Nicola Scott, Operations Manager Residential LAC Services
Helen Simmons, RHM Sorrel Drive and Acorns
Martin Sutcliffe, Unit Manager Lansdowne Secure Unit

22. MINUTES

22.1 RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2012 as a correct record.

23. APOLOGIES

23.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Waite.

24. REPORTS

24.1 Copies of the reports referred to below are included in the minute book.

25. THE IMPACT ON LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN OF THRIVE

25.1 The Panel considered a verbal update from the Assistant Director for Children and Families which set out the impact of the THRIVE programme on Looked After Children. She explained that the numbers of LAC were stabilising, and that the pressure at the “front door” of the Service was reducing. She announced that there would be a conference in April to launch the Early Help strategy and there will be continued work focussing on Children’s Centres as part of this.

25.2 The Panel requested information on the potential impact on the Service of women going in to prison for short sentences. The prevalence of domestic violence for this group of women was also queried. Members were informed that domestic violence was a factor in the majority of child protection cases, often coupled with substance abuse and mental health issues, but that children coming into care because of the imprisonment of their mothers was not a substantial issue for the LAC Service as far as we know at the moment. Further investigation will be undertaken to check out that initial reaction.

25.3 RESOLVED to note the update.

26. REGIONAL CORPORATE PARENTING SEMINAR

26.1 The Chair reported on a regional Corporate Parenting seminar, held in Chichester on 7 December 2012 and involving Member and officer representatives from West Sussex, Brighton & Hove, Kent, Hampshire, Portsmouth, Surrey, Medway, Southampton and the Isle of Wight, together with David Simmonds of the Local Government Association's Children and Young People Board. She and Councillor Belsey had attended on behalf of East Sussex County Council.

26.2 Councillor Stroude set out the principal topics of discussion at the Seminar, such as: how to reduce "the churn" (ie children coming in and out of care) , a Charter for fulfilling the Corporate Parenting role, the use of kinship carers, the role of the Panel in challenging and scrutinising the Service, the need for training of Members and the use of boarding schools for LAC if appropriate..

26.3 The Panel discussed: private children's homes and the County Council's responsibility for them; the need for training regarding the role of Corporate Parents for all new Members following the election, and for more specialised training or mentoring for any new Panel members to ensure a continuity of approach; how to ensure the most efficient use of staff time when engaging with the Panel, in terms of visits by Panel members to residential homes and at Panel meetings; and how best to incentivise LAC in the children's homes to engage with educational opportunities.

26.4 The Panel was informed that the County Council retained responsibility for safeguarding the welfare of children in private children's home, and that there was a register of such homes in the County, including the number of placements offered. The level of interest Panel members showed in the work of the ESCC residential homes was acknowledged and welcomed. The registered homes managers assured the Panel of their creative use of sanctions and rewards to encourage attendance at school.

26.5 RESOLVED to note the report.

27. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) STATISTICS

27.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which outlined the changes to the Looked After Children (LAC) statistics in the last quarter.

27.2 Members' attention was drawn in particular to: the stabilising of the overall numbers of Looked After Children; the reduction in number of agency fostering placements; the increase in kinship carers and the continued increased use of Residence and Special Guardianship Orders.

27.3 The Panel discussed: the increase in prospective adopters wanting to adopt sibling groups; the flexible use of fostering to adopt as a means to secure the best outcomes for a small number of Looked After Children; the increase in foster carers as a result of the recent publicity campaign, the workload of the Fostering Panel and agency carers switching to work for ESCC.

27.4 RESOLVED to note the information contained in the report.

28. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

28.1 RESOLVED to exclude the public and press from the meeting for the remaining items on the grounds that if the public and press were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as specified in category 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12(A) of the Local Government Act

1972 (as amended), namely information relating to any individual. It is considered that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

29. OFSTED REPORTS

29.1 The Panel considered reports received from Ofsted on the following services:

- (i) Acorns at Dorset Road
- (ii) The Bungalow, Sorrel Drive

29.2 RESOLVED to note the reports.

30. CHILDREN'S HOMES REGULATIONS 1991, REGULATION 33: INSPECTION REPORTS

30.1 The Panel considered Regulation 33 Reports for September and October 2012 for the following Children's Homes:

- (i) Acorns at Dorset Road
- (ii) Brodrick House
- (iii) Hazel Lodge
- (iv) Homefield Cottage
- (v) Lansdowne Secure Unit
- (vi) Rose Cottage
- (vii) The Bungalow, Sorrel Drive

30.2 RESOLVED to note the reports.