

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 19 April 2013 at County Hall, Lewes

PRESENT: Councillors Ost, St Pierre, Stroude (Chair), Mrs Tidy and Tidy

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

Liz Rugg, Assistant Director, Children and Families
Jill Dale, Children in Care Council Facilitator
CH, Children in Care Council Member
CW, Children in Care Council Member
Steve Hurst, Operations Manager, Fostering Team
Carole Sykes, Operations Manager, Adoption and Permanence

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

31. MINUTES

31.1 RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2013 as a correct record.

32. APOLOGIES

32.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors O'Keeffe and Waite.

32.2 It was noted that Councillors Mrs Tidy and Tidy were acting as substitutes for Councillors Hughes and Pragnell.

32.3 Apologies were also received from Teresa Lavelle-Hill, Head of Looked After Children Services, and Martin Sutcliffe, Unit Manager, Lansdowne Secure Unit.

33. REPORTS

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

34. CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL

34.1 CH and CW, members of the Children in Care Council (CiCC), attended the meeting to update the Panel on the Council's work and achievements. These include:

- Meeting with the Children's Minister's Advisory Group
- Hosting Action Days on anti bullying and Stranger Danger
- Meeting the judiciary
- Attending RPPR meetings regarding funding for the Virtual School
- Serving on Recruitment Panels for senior staff

- Attending National Take Over day with representatives in the Independent Reviewing, Careleavers and Participation Teams
- Success with Keystone awards, with three platinum awards (equivalent to A* GCSE) and 10 gold awards, together with nine bronze Art awards and first aid training.

34.2 Anthony Julyan and Liz Rugg provided their experiences of serving with, and being interviewed by, CiCC members on Recruitment Panels. The Panel took particular note of the positive contribution made by the CiCC in recruiting staff, reflecting the importance the Council places on having staff that young people can work with.

34.3 The Panel discussed the County Council's Pledge to children in care and rural transport. It was confirmed that the Pledge was under review, as it was three years old, and that the CiCC was involved in broadening the Pledge. With regard to transport the CiCC members reported that supporting development of cheaper transport options that are more appropriate to their needs remained a live issue on the agenda of the Youth Cabinet.

34.4 The Panel congratulated the CiCC members on their presentation, and encouraged them to remain engaged and to consider standing for election in due course. They reassured the CiCC members of the Panel's support for Looked After Children, and that any concerns could be brought to them.

34.5 RESOLVED to note the update.

35. ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT OF THE EAST SUSSEX FOSTERING SERVICE

35.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services, which set out the annual progress report of the East Sussex Fostering Service from April 2012 to March 2013. Steve Hunt, Operations Manager of the Service, updated the Panel with the final end of year figures as at 31 March 2013:

Total Children in Care – 596

Of those: in foster placements – 484 (515 in same period 2011/12)

In-house – 302

Agency – 121

Kinship placements – 41

Parent and baby placement – 4

Supported lodgings – 16

Fostering Duty Team referrals received – 497 (177 fewer than same period 2011/12)

Of those: 373 resulted in placements

58 no placement needed as other support provided was successful

66 in the process of being matched

35.2 Steve Hunt highlighted the following from the report: 43 households recruited, providing 76 placements; the Children in Care Council's 'Skills to Foster' course; the addition of three staff recruitment team; the success of the 'Fill a Space' campaign; the development of the Service to provide quicker assessments of applicants and better monitoring and supervision of foster carers; the input from the Children and Adolescents Mental Health Service and the joint working to reduce the waiting list for referrals; the success of the Therapeutic Parenting Group.

35.3 He also paid tribute to the work of the Children in Care Council and their achievements, both academic and in respect of their participation in matters relating to Looked After Children nationally. This involved meeting judges, the Children's Minister and Shadow Minister, and representatives from NICE, to provide their perspective as Looked After Children.

35.4 The Panel discussed: the concept of the wider foster family, including children who foster; the integration of the LAC and Health and Wellbeing agendas; the aging population of foster carers and the impact of the recession on recruitment. In response Steve Hunt highlighted the work of the Foster Care Association and the surgeries held by Operations Managers which are held to solve problems faced by carers. In respect of aging carers he confirmed that the Service was targeting a younger demographic, and had recently successfully appointed a couple in their 30s. He also reported that the Service maintained a critical line in respect of approving requests to be foster parents, from new applicants and former agency fosterers, and for multiple placements, which was welcomed by the Panel.

35.5 The Panel discussed the use of supported lodgings. Steve Hunt confirmed that these were not exclusively for Looked After Children, and were used to assist health and housing colleagues. He reported that the Service had recruited their first Enhanced Supported Lodging carer to take in the most challenging older young people as a pilot for a wrap-around service with a range of partners. The Panel shared their knowledge of potential partners in Newhaven and Eastbourne.

35.6 Steve Hunt brought the East Sussex Foster Care Association's annual conference in Battle to the Panel's attention. Liz Rugg confirmed that a new Charter would be signed at the conference. In response to a query from the Panel Steve Hunt confirmed that the Service was looking to expand the range of the advertising campaign and information evenings to include the north of the county, together with a new internet-based approach which had proved successful in other areas.

35.7 RESOLVED to note the report.

36. ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT OF THE EAST SUSSEX ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE SERVICE

36.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which set out the annual progress report of the Adoption and Permanence Service from April 2012 to March 2013. Carole Sykes, Operations Manager of the Service, explained the Government's interest in the area and recent changes in legislation, and that East Sussex is now at the cutting edge of practice.

36.2 Carole Sykes highlighted: the success of the East Sussex pilot of the prospective adopter report, designed to speed up the recruitment process and which can lead to approvals of adopters in five months; and the change to the decision making process for children with a plan for adoption and the responsibility of the agency decision maker, as a result of the Family Justice Review.

36.3 The Panel discussed: the consequences of the Review in terms of pressure on the agency decision maker; the causes of delays in the previous regime; continuing to place children locally, where there are no safeguarding issues that require an interagency placement; the dedication of Panel members; the success of the recent recruitment campaign, with prospective adopters approaching the Council on the strength of its reputation; creative ways of reducing the number of moves for young babies, and persuading the judiciary to accept these as in the best interest of the child; and the work of the Virtual School in supporting the Service.

36.4 RESOLVED to note the report.

38. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) STATISTICS

38.1 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.

38.2 Members' attention was drawn in particular to: the stabilising of the figures for Looked After Children at a lower level; the use of Special Guardianship and Residence Orders following a period of kinship care; the increase of placements at home, which are carefully monitored. An apparent increase in the number of agency placements was explained as a coding error.

38.3 The Panel discussed: absconding and how it is monitored, dealt with by the registered homes managers and recorded; and the risk of sexual exploitation and the steps taken to train young people and staff to ensure their safety, in both local authority and privately registered homes, in accordance with the Council's safeguarding duty.

38.4 RESOLVED to note the information contained in the report.

39. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

39.1 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.

40. OFSTED REPORTS

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

- (i) Acorns at Dorset Road
- (ii) Brodrick House
- (iii) Hazel Lodge
- (iv) Homefield Cottage
- (v) Rose Cottage

40.2 RESOLVED to note the reports.

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

41.1 The Panel considered Regulation 33 Reports for November and December 2012 and January and February 2013 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

41.2 RESOLVED to note the reports.