



CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

FRIDAY 8 JULY 2016

10.00 AM COMMITTEE ROOM, COUNTY HALL, LEWES

MEMBERSHIP - Councillors Ruth O'Keeffe, Peter Charlton, Charles Clark, Roy Galley, Jim Sheppard, Rosalyn St. Pierre and Sylvia Tidy

A G E N D A

- 1 Election of Chair
- 2 Minutes of the meeting held on 22 April 2016 (*Pages 3 - 6*)
- 3 Apologies for absence
- 4 Declarations of interest
Disclosure by all members present of personal interests in matters on the agenda, the nature of any interest and whether the member regards the interest as prejudicial under the terms of the Code of Conduct.
- 5 Urgent Items
Notification of items which the Chair considers to be urgent and proposes to take at the end of the appropriate part of the agenda. Any members who wish to raise urgent items are asked, wherever possible, to notify the Chair before the start of the meeting. In so doing, they must state the special circumstances which they consider justify the matter being considered urgently.
- 6 Exclusion of Press and Public
To consider excluding the public and press from the meeting for the next three agenda 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 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), namely information relating to any individual.
- 7 Ofsted Inspection reports for The Bungalow - March 2016 (*Pages 7 - 14*)
Report by the Director of Children's Services
- 8 Children's Home Regulations 1991, Regulation 44: Inspection reports for February to May 2016
 - 8a Acorns at Dorset Road (*Pages 15 - 44*)
 - 8b Brodrick House (*Pages 45 - 92*)
 - 8c Hazel Lodge (*Pages 93 - 146*)
 - 8d Homefield Cottage (*Pages 147 - 190*)
 - 8e Lansdowne Secure Unit (*Pages 191 - 250*)
 - 8f The Bungalow, Sorrel Drive (*Pages 251 - 286*)

- 9 Any other exempt items considered urgent by the Chair.
- 10 Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2015/16 (*Pages 287 - 298*)
Report by Director of Children's Services
- 11 Annual Progress Report of the East Sussex Fostering Service (*Pages 299 - 312*)
Report by the Director of Children's Services
- 12 Annual progress report of the East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service (*Pages 313 - 320*)
Report by the Director of Children's Services
- 13 Looked After Children (LAC) Statistics - (*to follow*)
Report by the Director of Children's Services
- 14 Any other non-exempt items considered urgent by the Chair.

PHILIP BAKER
Assistant Chief Executive
County Hall, St Anne's Crescent
LEWES BN7 1UE

30 June 2016

Contact: Hannah Matthews, 01273 335138
Email: hannah.matthews@eastsussex.gov.uk

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held at County Hall, Lewes on 22 April 2016.

PRESENT Councillors Charles Clark, Roy Galley, Jim Sheppard,
Roselyn St. Pierre and Sylvia Tidy

ALSO PRESENT Liz Rugg, Assistant Director Early Help and Social Care
Teresa Lavelle-Hill, Joint Head of Looked After Children Services
Nathan Caine, Head of ISEND Provider Services
Nigel Hewitt, RHM Lansdowne Secure Unit
Janet Fairless, RHM Brodrick House and Homefield Cottage
Nicky Scott, Operations Manager Residential LAC Services
Helen Simmons, RHM Acorns and The Bungalow
Ian Williams, RHM Hazel Lodge

32 ELECTION OF CHAIR

32.1 Councillor Galley was appointed as Chair for the meeting.

33 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29 JANUARY 2016

33.1 RESOLVED to agree as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2016.

34 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

34.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor O'Keeffe.

35 DISCLOSURE BY ALL MEMBERS PRESENT OF PERSONAL INTERESTS

35.1 There were none.

36 NOTIFICATION OF URGENT ITEMS

36.1 There were none.

37 UPDATE ON PREPARATIONS FOR SEND INSPECTION

37.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services. Nathan Caine, Head of ISEND Provider Services, set out that this was to be a Local Area inspection which would encompass Health, Social Care and Education provision. He highlighted the priority areas that have been identified through the comprehensive self-assessment, in the light of learning from the recent School Improvement Service inspection. He also highlighted the aspirations contained within the Inclusion and SEND Strategy.

- Ensure that children/young people and carers are involved in the shaping of their education provision and that there is excellent communication between professionals in drawing up and reviewing Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).
- Ensure that schools and education providers have a good understanding of the additional challenges faced by LAC with SEN and that they take appropriate steps to accelerate improvements so that they can achieve good outcomes.
- Ensure that there are robust systems in place to ensure a good transition into adulthood, independence and ongoing training/education opportunities which are aimed at realising the ambitions of all LAC.

37.2 The Panel noted that East Sussex was above the national average in terms of percentage of children identified as having SEND (3.8% compared with 2.8%) and enquired about the ratio of children entering the care system that have a Statement of Special Educational Needs or an EHCP, which was commented on by Regulation 44 and Ofsted Inspectors when visiting the County's children's homes. Nathan Caine set out the percentage figure was reducing, from over 4%, and that funding arrangements for children with SEND had changed, and payments were no longer directly connected to Statements. He also set out that not all children who enter the care system have an educational need but that there is a significant proportion with EHCPs or statements, and that work was being done to strengthen school-based provision of support.

37.3 The Panel enquired about working with mental health services. The work of the county-wide Children's Integrated Therapy Service and the positive links with the ESHT paediatric services were highlighted as good examples of partnership working. Work to develop the most effective early interventions to maximise the impact was set out, including changes to Inclusion Units in schools to focus on nurturing and improving emotional wellbeing, to help the child return to a mainstream class. Teresa Lavelle-Hill, Joint Head of the Looked After Children Service highlighted the LAC CAMHS service which works with foster carers and the residential homes and secure unit, and the Virtual School who work with designated teachers to address attachment difficulties. The care leavers service benefits from the input of a mental health nurse as part of the multi-disciplinary team.

37.4 The need to target the funding from the High Needs funding block to where it will have the most effect was stressed, as was working efficiently with partners, and increasing early support in schools. The aim of achieving a person centred process, taking into account the voice of the child, was reiterated. It was confirmed that 90% of children get involved in the annual review of their statutory plan, and that the Advocacy Service was available to assist all Looked After Children.

37.5 RESOLVED to (1) note the details of the upcoming inspection programme for SEND; and

(2) note the preparation work that is underway to ensure that the County Council is best prepared for inspection and that the outcomes for children and young people are realised.

38 SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN SECURE TRAINING CENTRES

38.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services.

38.2 The Assistant Director reassured the Panel that there are currently no East Sussex children at the Medway Youth Secure Training Centre. Those that had been there recently had been visited by their Youth Offending Team and Looked After Children Service workers, to offer support and obtain information.

38.3 The Centre is currently the subject of a serious case review. It was also confirmed that any decision to place an East Sussex child at the Medway Centre or indeed at any other secure establishment would be made by the Youth Justice Board, taking into account the vulnerability of the child, and the child would be provided with support by the YOT and LAC services.

38.4 RESOLVED to note the action that has been taken as both a local and national level to safeguard vulnerable Looked After Children who are remanded or sentenced to secure establishments via a criminal court.

39 TO CONSIDER EXCLUDING THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

39.1 The Panel agreed to exclude the press and public for the next two agenda items on the basis that if they were present there would be disclosure to them of information considered to be exempt by virtue of Category 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), namely information relating to any individual.

40 OFSTED INSPECTION REPORTS FOR THE FOLLOWING:

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

- (a) Acorns at Dorset Road
- (b) Brodrick House
- (c) Hazel Lodge
- (d) Homefield Cottage
- (e) The Bungalow, Sorrel Drive

40.2 It was confirmed that considerable work had been undertaken to address the points raised in the previous round of full inspections.

40.3 The Panel RESOLVED to note the reports.

41 CHILDREN'S HOME REGULATIONS 2015, REGULATION 44: INSPECTION REPORTS FOR DECEMBER 2015, JANUARY 2016

41.1 The Panel considered Regulation 44 Reports for December 2015 and January 2016 for the following Children's Homes:

- (a) Acorns at Dorset Road
- (b) Brodrick House
- (c) Hazel Lodge
- (d) Homefield Cottage
- (e) Lansdowne Secure Unit
- (f) The Bungalow, Sorrel Drive

41.2 Each Registered Home Manager gave a brief oral update on activity at the home covering the period since the last Panel meeting and bringing the Panel up to date on issues such as staff accommodation and training.

41.3 The Panel RESOLVED to (1) note the reports;

(2) thank Helen Simmons for her work in managing two homes, one of which was undergoing building works, and the other managers in implementing changes recommended by Ofsted; and

(3) welcome the investment in therapeutic parenting training being undertaken by all of the residential units.

42 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) STATISTICS

42.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided an update on changes to Looked After Children statistics over Quarter 3 of 2015/16, which showed a slight upturn.

42.2 The Panel was informed that the reporting functions of the new client recording system were being investigated, in order to be able to provide the detailed breakdown in categories of LAC.

42.3 There are currently 88 sets of care proceedings. Foster care placements, both in-house and with agencies, are difficult to arrange at the moment, partly due to the effect of large numbers of unaccompanied asylum seekers arriving in Kent in need of accommodation. The Panel was encouraged to identify interested individuals or groups, and to signpost the Looked After Children service to people who might wish to apply to be foster carers or offer supported lodgings.

42.4 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

The meeting ended at 11.35 am.

Agenda Item 7

By virtue of paragraph(s) 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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Report to: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date of meeting: Friday 8 July 2016

By: Director of Children's Services

Title: Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2015/16

Purpose: To update the Corporate Parenting Panel on the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers to Quality Assuring and Improving Services for Looked After Children

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report

1 Background

1.1 This Annual IRO report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Services in East Sussex as required by statutory guidance.

2 Supporting information

2.1 The report is attached as appendix 1.

3. Recommendations

3.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report.

STUART GALLIMORE
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Alex Sutton, Operations Manager – Safeguarding Unit

Tel. No. 01323 466275

Email: alex.sutton@eastsussex.gov.uk

LOCAL MEMBERS

All

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Annual Independent Reviewing Officer Report

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

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Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report April 2015 – March 2016

The Contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to Quality Assuring and Improving Services for Looked After Children (CLA)

This Annual IRO report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Services in East Sussex as required by statutory guidance.

The IRO Annual Report must be presented to: Corporate Parenting Board and the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

1. Purpose of service and legal context

- 1.1 The IRO service is set within the framework of the updated IRO Handbook, linked to revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance which were introduced in April 2011. The responsibility of the IRO has changed from the management of the Review process to a wider overview of the case including regular monitoring and follow-up between Reviews. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of Care Planning for CLA and for challenging drift and delay. One of the key tasks for IROs is to build relationships with children, young people and the professional and family network to enhance effective planning for positive outcomes.
- 1.2 The National Children's Bureau (NCB) research 'The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officers in England' (March 2014) provides a wealth of information and findings regarding the efficacy of IRO services. The foreword written by Mr Justice Peter Jackson; makes the following comment:

The Independent Reviewing Officer must be the visible embodiment of our commitment to meet our legal obligations to this special group of children. The health and effectiveness of the IRO service is a direct reflection of whether we are meeting that commitment, or whether we are failing.

2. Overview and Update

Key messages

Achievements for 15/16 included:

- The delivery of outcome focussed care plans
- Enhancing children and young people’s understanding of IROs and Child Protection Advisors (CPA) roles and responsibilities
- Effective communication with operational teams
- Increased quality assurance feedback activity for locality and children looked after teams
- Continued challenge to the operational teams regarding care planning
- Implementation of new legislation for permanence

2.1 The single child’s plan is now integrated into the whole system and is designed to be responsive and dynamic to the child’s changing needs and environment. Since last summer the new approach to child protection conferences has been piloted across the whole service using the headings below as the central focus for the conference.

2.2

What’s Working Well? <i>(Strengths)</i>	What are we worried about? <i>(Risks/Needs)</i>	What will it look like if things improve <i>(Goal)</i>	Who does what, by when?
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2.3 Building on this with the implementation of the new social care information system, it is also now central to the processes involving children who are looked after. The purpose is to enhance collaboration with children, parents, carers and other professionals making the plans more accessible, relevant, specific, incremental and focussed on the identified outcome.

2.4 See below for brief example:

What's working well? Strengths	What are we worried about? Risks/Needs	What will it look like when things improve? Goals	Who does what, by when?
Billy and Barney’s behaviour has been calmer since being placed in foster care.	Billy and Barney have not shown any distress or emotional response after leaving their mothers care.	Billy and Barney are able to show their feelings and vulnerability, trusting that they will be comforted and listened to.	1) K and SW will do some play activities with them to help them understand about foster care and their care plans. Starting within the week.
Billy and Barney appear to be responding to boundaries and nurturing consistent care.	How their experience of not having their needs for warmth, comfort, food, education and nurture met has affected them over time.	Billy and Barney begin to see their needs as important and expect them to be met consistently and warmly.	2) K will do activities with the boys to build their self-esteem and confidence and help them to understand what is and isn’t safe. Starting immediately.
Barney is learning not to retaliate if	How the changing moods and reactions to them from their parents has affected	Billy and Barney learn to make sense of their experiences and can take part in thinking about	3) SW and foster carers to consult with LAC/CAMHS to

Billy smacks him.	<p>them.</p> <p>Billy and Barney can be very physically aggressive towards each other.</p> <p>Billy and Barney crave adult attention and can be over familiar with people that they don't know making them vulnerable.</p> <p>Impact of losses they have experienced siblings, parents. Barney has asked mum where her baby is.</p>	<p>and talking about what the options are for their future and what they want to happen.</p>	<p>think about meeting the boys' emotional needs and whether interventions like theraplay might be helpful for Billy and Barney.</p>
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2.4 IROs update the care plan during the review to reflect progress and decisions made at the review. To manage a particularly difficult review or to enhance participation IROs have used flipchart paper and held the review in the same way as a child protection conference to good effect. There is an evaluation exercise currently underway regarding the new conference model and the outcome will inform the ongoing development of the LAC review process. So far the feedback has been very positive but it is one part of continual improvement that will be reviewed, revised and enhanced over time.

2.5 Problem resolution and escalation

2.5.1 One of the pivotal roles of the IRO/CPA is to raise issues affecting a child's care where, for example, performance issues, care planning and resources are affecting the child or young person's progress. IROs will always discuss issues with the social worker or their manager but if there is no resolution there is a formal process known as a Dispute Resolution Process whereby the issue can be escalated to the attention of senior managers and ultimately the Chief Executive and Cafcass for resolution.

2.5.2 In previous annual reports only those issues that go into a formal dispute were detailed. These are few and many more are resolved before getting to the formal process. Although we do not at the moment maintain separate records of these, over the last year there have been at least 30 children where issues have been raised by the IRO and these have been resolved without going into a formal dispute.

2.5.3 Although many and varied broadly the main themes were suitability of placements, drift in care planning including planning for permanence, delay in revocation of Placement Orders, delay in issuing care proceedings, delay in completing risk assessment to inform planning, out of date recording and plans, encouraging broader look at care planning options (placement with parents for example) and encouraging timely decision making sure that children know about the things that are important to them such as school placements.

2.5.4 Some examples include 3 children who are placed together permanently have been asking to have this confirmed but there has been delay due to the social worker not having completed the necessary paperwork. The IRO advocated on behalf of the children and the matter was resolved. A young person's placement had broken down and the IRO advocated for an assessment of the mother to be included in the care planning and this was resolved but will need on-going review. A further example

involves 2 siblings whose placement was breaking down and there were no placements available for the children to be placed together given their complex and challenging needs. Although understanding the difficulties the IRO was clear that she did not agree with this care plan. A placement was found for them together but the IRO was then once again on the brink of raising a formal dispute because there was no clear risk assessment and the placement was very near to their mother's home. An urgent risk assessment was undertaken and the placement went ahead.

- 2.5.5 There is good communication between the IROs, Practice Managers and Social Workers and as well as raising issues, IROs acknowledge good practice. This is also often escalated to senior managers so that it is acknowledged across the service. Examples of these include praise for effective direct work with a child, speedy and timely decision making, managing changes for a child smoothly and passing on children's feedback. An example of this is two young people who spoke about their foster carers in the review, one saying that the best thing about his foster home was "his opinion always counts" and the other child said "they are the most loving and caring people in the world".
- 2.5.6 Over the last year there have been 2 formal challenges using the Dispute Resolution Procedures.
- 2.5.7 One involved a young person with very challenging behaviour whose placement ended suddenly due to the unexpected death of one of the carers. There was evidence that his placement was struggling to meet his complex needs and there was a delay in an assessment of this placement. Consequently a dispute was raised to challenge the delay in the assessment. This was escalated to senior managers. The assessment was completed and the young person's placement was changed.
- 2.5.8 The other was where there was drift in care planning for a child who was voluntarily accommodated. The IRO initiated a dispute and raised this with senior managers. Proceedings were initiated and there is now a clear plan for the child.
- 2.5.9 The dispute resolution process is currently under review to change the focus to 'issues resolution' whilst maintaining the focus on the professional challenge. This is due to go for wider consultation.

2.6 New legislation

- 2.6.1 Reflecting the views of children and young people who are securely settled in permanent placements the law changed this year to reduce the levels of Children's Services intervention in their lives. Specifically this means potentially having one review meeting a year. Where cases are reviewed on an annual basis there will be a paper review that the IRO undertakes by consultation every 6 months. Also social work visits to CLA where annual reviews are agreed can reduce to a minimum of 6 monthly instead of 3 monthly.
- 2.6.2 These arrangements are agreed by IROs at a review having been authorised by CLA services and are specifically for children who have been in a permanent placement for 1 year. This is currently being trialled with an identified list of potential children and will be evaluated in the autumn.

2.7 Contact cards for children

- 2.7.1 The idea of having an introductions card with the contact details of the IRO and a brief explanation of their role for children and young people to have when they are first accommodated changed into a card with the contact details of the social worker as well as the IRO and this is currently being finalised by the Children in Care Council.

3 Quantitative information about the IRO/CPA service

**1,229 CLA review meetings were held in the year up to 18th February, 2016
(Compared with 1688 in 12/13 and 1530 in 13/14 and 1232 in 14/15)**

- 3.1 Although THRIVE programme is no longer in place the targets for the year remained.

As at 31 st March 2015	Thrive target	Actual figures
CP	502	469
LAC	522	548
31st March 2016	Target	
CP	469	459 (18.2.16)
LAC	522	548 (18.2.16)

- 3.2 CLA numbers have been stable over the year ending last year on 548 and on the 18.2.16 they were also 548. However the trend of numbers reducing has continued and at the time of writing they are below 540 but they are still above the target set of 522.

- 3.3 There are minor differences in the profile of the children as at the 18.2.16.

31.3.15	18.2.16
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 41% female • 59% male • 15% BME • 6% have a disability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 42% female • 58 % male • 14% BME • 7.5% involved with disability teams

- 3.4 A closer look at the figures indicates that there are marginally more children 52% who are 11 and under and within this group 55% are male. Consequently the differential in this cohort is significantly lower than the 12 and over group with 62% male and a differential of 24%.

- 3.5 The analysis of our CLA population who are BME is complex and should also take into account areas

of deprivation. The numbers of children in East Sussex are relatively small but the highest cohort of CLA are white any other background (19 children). We know that in the community as a whole this is also the highest cohort and out of this group the majority are Polish (according to schools information so therefore only reflects school age children). However this does not appear to be reflected in the CLA group where there are 4 children of Polish heritage representing 21% of this group. Ofsted has recently published national information about the personal characteristics, including age, gender and ethnicity, of all children looked after on 31 March 2015 as well as details of the child's placement, including the type of placement, and location.

- 3.6 In terms of pressures within East Sussex the numbers for children aged between 10 and 17 is the same as the national picture of 60% and within that group the highest numbers of children who are looked after are aged between 15 and 17. Much can be written about the complexities of working with these young people but the review process provides a forum for the young person and agencies to come together to consider their needs and develop personal plans.
- 3.7 Another key finding of the Ofsted report was that CLA from Ethnic Minorities were more likely to be placed in an area with higher levels of crime. Areas with higher levels of crime had 38% of BME children living within them and 25% of White children. The opposite is true in ES but the numbers are so low that it is difficult to draw conclusions. As at 31st March 2015, 5.1% of CLA from Ethnic Minorities were placed in areas with the most crime (top 25%), compared to 12.4% of White British CLA. As at 31st March 2016, 7.7% of CLA from Ethnic Minorities were placed in areas with the most crime (top 25%), compared to 13.0% of White British CLA. There will be further analysis and consideration of the issues affecting CLA in East Sussex over the coming year.

4 Children's Participation

- 4.1 Encouraging children and young people to take part in their reviews begins at an early age in recognition of the importance of this to his or her self-esteem and self-efficacy and the consequent impact on good outcomes. Ways of engaging children are many, varied and highly individual and we try to measure this in a number of ways.
- 4.2 Some national standard measures for children are reported quarterly to the Department of Education. Our target figure for children's participation in their review for the year is 95%. This is consistently exceeded and this year was higher again than last year at 98.5% compared with 98.2% in 14/15, 95.4% in 13/14 and 96.9% in 12/13. (NB however our figures for this year only go up to the middle of February due to a reporting issue following the implementation of the new recording system in February 2016)
- 4.3 There was an increase in children and young people attending their reviews, over half, 51.8% compared with 49.1% in 14/15.
- 4.4 14 children did not participate at all in their reviews. The majority of these were children who were not of an age or understanding to contribute to the review or because it was so complex and there were so many other people speaking to them it was not appropriate to include them on that occasion. The remaining 4 were young people aged 16 & 17 who were either due to attend but did not do so on the day or who are clear that they did not want to attend.

5 What children and young people have been saying to their IRO/CPA

A young care leaver who is now 22 got in touch with his IRO (who had not seen him for 4 years) asking to meet for coffee, so he could let him know "how well he was doing". They arranged to meet at the local Costa Coffee shop (other coffee shops are available) and he was very proud to tell him that he was now living independently in his own flat and was working as a care assistant in a residential unit for adults with learning difficulties. He said he wasn't sure if he would have been able to achieve all this without the consistent support and encouragement that the IRO had given him during LAC Reviews whilst he was being looked after and he had remembered what the IRO had told him about believing in himself and always doing his best. He felt the IRO had been the most consistent person in his life (apart from his foster carers) for the five years he was looked after until he was eighteen.

A young person thanked their IRO for suggesting life story work as it had been very helpful.

A girl wrote to her IRO thanking her for asking her questions (consultation for Lac review) as sometimes they make her feel safe.

Another rang to ask the IRO to help them with a complaint which they duly did and the outcome was positive.

A young person rang their IRO to ask who their social worker was because they had been transferred to another team and didn't know who they were.

6. Qualitative information about the IRO service

6.1 Late reviews

6.2. Services for CLA are highly regulated with specific timescales for reviews. The unit work hard to achieve this so that children's plans can be considered in a timely way. Over the last year we have developed new practice guidance for managing timescales when reviews are adjourned or held as a series of meetings. Due to the way these have previously been recorded, in the short term this resulted in a small increase in reviews regarded as late. Unfortunately due to reporting issues following the implementation of the new recording system we do not have absolutely accurate data but there were 6 late reviews reported which is the same figure as in the previous year.

6.3 The majority of these were due to meetings needing to be adjourned due to key people not being present or where the team was not notified of a placement within timescales. One was a couple of days late because it was out of area, the young person had a number of other meetings and key professionals who were important to the child and to care planning were only able to make it on that day.

6.4 Permanence Outcomes

- 6.4.1 A central function of the IRO role is to ensure timely planning for outcomes for permanence for children and to challenge any drift. IROs liaise closely with Children's Guardians when there are care proceedings and contribute their views to the final care plan.
- 6.4.2. A permanence plan should be discussed and agreed at the second review. Looking at children under 12 only, 12% did not have a permanence plan agreed by the 2nd review. This amounted to 10 children and most were situations where there was new information or a new event to consider thus causing reasonable delay but no significant drift. However for 3 children the issue of permanency was not addressed as robustly by the IRO and there was some drift but this has now been addressed.

6.5 Children who put themselves at risk

- 6.5.1 As part of monitoring services for children who are at risk from, for example, child sexual exploitation, IRO/CPAs record whether a child is identified as at risk and whether agencies are working together effectively to reduce that risk. IROs assessed 124 children and young people as being at high risk. For 7 of these young people the IROs did not judge that agencies were working together sufficiently to address the risks. IRO/CPAs follow this up on an individual basis with the relevant teams.
- 6.5.2 Four of these children were part of the group mentioned earlier of children where issues were resolved without recourse to formal dispute procedures. One young woman is vulnerable to child sexual exploitation and has recently been placed in a secure unit. Another was a young man who was putting himself at physical risk at work.
- 6.5.3 The final one of these 7 is a young man who is experiencing considerable delay in the resolution of a criminal investigation involving an alleged sexual assault. This has been going on for over 6 months and it is preventing effective planning for him. IROs have raised the issue of children and young people waiting for the resolution of police proceedings with senior managers because it has such a significant impact on young people and their ability to progress in their lives including with education, placements and becoming independent.

7. Professional Profile of the IRO and CPA Service

- 7.1 The IRO service sits within the Performance and Planning Directorate of Children's Services and is managed by the Head of Safeguarding, Douglas Sinclair, and two operations managers, Sue McGlynn and Alex Sutton who have the leads for the IRO and Child Protection Adviser (CPA) role in Child Protection and LAC respectively. When the unit was created, chairing Child Protection Conferences (CPC) and LAC reviews were separate specialisms. These two roles are further separated by the different legislation and regulatory protocols underpinning them. Although in the main the roles are no longer separated the names have stuck and chairs have been referred to within this report as IRO/CPA.
- 7.2 The IRO/CPA team is currently made up of 9.6 fte staff at Practice Manager level (LMG2). This equates to 10 IRO/CPAs, 8 working full time and 2 part time. In order to manage the day to day

demands of the service across the year the Unit has at times required the services of two part time independent consultants.

7.3 This reduction in numbers for children subject to Child Protection plans has had a significant impact on IRO/CPA's caseloads and with the advent of the new caseload weighting system IRO/CPA's are seeing their workloads reducing and the average of 90 cases was sustained throughout the year, although this number is still above the national recommendations of the IRO Handbook of between 50 and 70 cases.

7.4 IRO/CPAs undertake a number of different activities:

- 6.6 IRO/CPAs chair CP Conferences as well as CLA reviews
- 3 IROs chair CLA reviews
- IRO/CPAs also see and quality assure all referrals for a conference on a duty basis
- 1 IRO has specialist lead for children with disabilities
- 2 IRO/CPAs lead LSCB training
- 1 IRO/CPA is part of the Young People's Participation Group
- 1 IRO/CPA chairs PREVENT meetings
- 2 IRO/CPAs led the implementation of the new Conference Model.

7.5 Amanda Glover, Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), is also part of the unit and has responsibility for managing allegations against people who work, care or volunteer with children. Operations Managers Sue McGlynn and Alex Sutton act as LADO when Amanda is on leave.

8. Conclusion and actions for the year ahead

8.1 An inescapable pressure over the past year has been the impact of the financial savings that need to be made by the council. Promoting stability for children and young people whose lives have been characterised by instability and abuse so that they can be safe, flourish and realise their potential is a complex challenge to the skills and resources of the service as a whole. During this time of financial pressure, delivering any changes safely for children and young people will draw on the need for teamwork between children, social workers, IRO/CPAs and colleagues in health and education. The effectiveness of this relies on the continuation of good communication and IRO/CPAs raising issues, where necessary, in a timely way. The IRO/CPAs are ideally placed to have eyes over the wider system and to identify any emerging concerns at an early stage to assist in keeping children safe.

Key messages

Improvement activities for the year ahead:

- Half day workshops and audits focussed on Mental Health; Care Leavers; diversity needs; sibling contact
- Improved quality of outcome focussed care plans
- Review progress of implementation of new procedures for Annual reviews
- Develop new Dispute Resolution procedure
- Consideration to how the IRO role may function within proposed innovations bid to central government in developing our work with adolescents

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Report to: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date: **8 July 2016**

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

Title of report: **Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Fostering Service
1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016**

Purpose of report: **To outline the performance of the Fostering Service between
1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016**

RECOMMENDATION:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report

1. Background

- 1.1 The Annual Progress report of the East Sussex Fostering Service is attached as Appendix 1.
- 1.2 Services to LAC are supported by base budgets within Children's Services. There are no increased costs arising from this report.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report.

STUART GALLIMORE
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Adrian Sewell, Operations Manager, Fostering. Tel: 01323 463121

Local Members: All

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 - Annual Progress report of the East Sussex Fostering Service

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

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Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Fostering Service 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016

1. Safeguarding

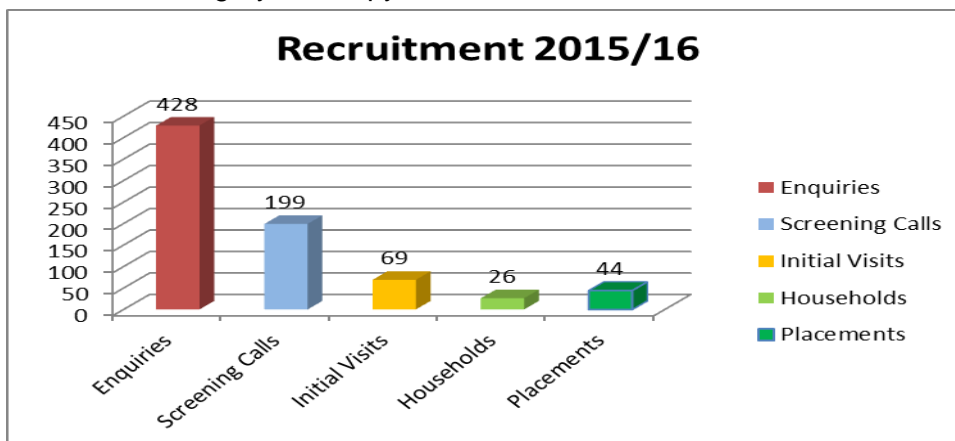
1.1 This outcome is fundamental to the delivery of fostering services across East Sussex and is embedded in each of the core functions: recruitment and retention; assessment, supervision and review; foster carer training; the matching and placing of children and young people with foster carers. These areas are addressed in more detail below.

2. Recruitment and Retention of Carers

2.1 2015 – 2016 proved to be a challenging year for fostering recruitment. The experiences of our immediate neighbours and Fostering Services nationally have also reflected that the recruitment of foster carers has been particularly challenging. While there appears to be no consistent rationale for this, a contributing factor is thought to be public awareness of historical allegations, highlighted in high profile prosecutions of abuse. In addition, the success of ESCC recruitment of foster carers over the last 2 or 3 years has, to some extent, exhausted the existing recruitment pool. This is evidenced in the poor quantity and quality of agency carers available in the East Sussex region. The age range of approval has also narrowed over the past year, with households being approved for sibling groups within a restrictive age range. Once foster carers have gained some experience, supervising social workers work with foster carers to extend their age range as they become more confident and skilled in managing the complex needs of many of our looked after children (LAC). The number of foster carers transferring from agencies still remains healthy, although many have been persuaded to remain with their own agencies by being offered huge financial incentives.

2.2 As with last year, the recruitment and retention team have continued to achieve their timescale targets for assessments of 6 – 8 months (dependent on the complexity of the assessment). In order to achieve the expedient and efficient transfer of carers from other agencies the recruitment and assessment team has implemented a timely assessment tool, optimising the existing statutory information from foster carers' previous agency. This has allowed ESCC to approve transferring carers within 3 months of their initial enquiry.

2.3 From 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016, 428 new enquiries were received which led to 199 screening calls and 69 initial visits to prospective foster carers. The recruitment strategy focused for the first part of the year on prioritising the recruitment of carers for older children. This resulted in very few enquiries. The strategy was then reviewed to include all age ranges. This resulted in an increase of enquiries as evidenced in the upturn of approvals towards the end of the year. The recruitment for Children with Disabilities (CWD) remains marketed under the same fostering banner with imagery and copy relevant to CWD.



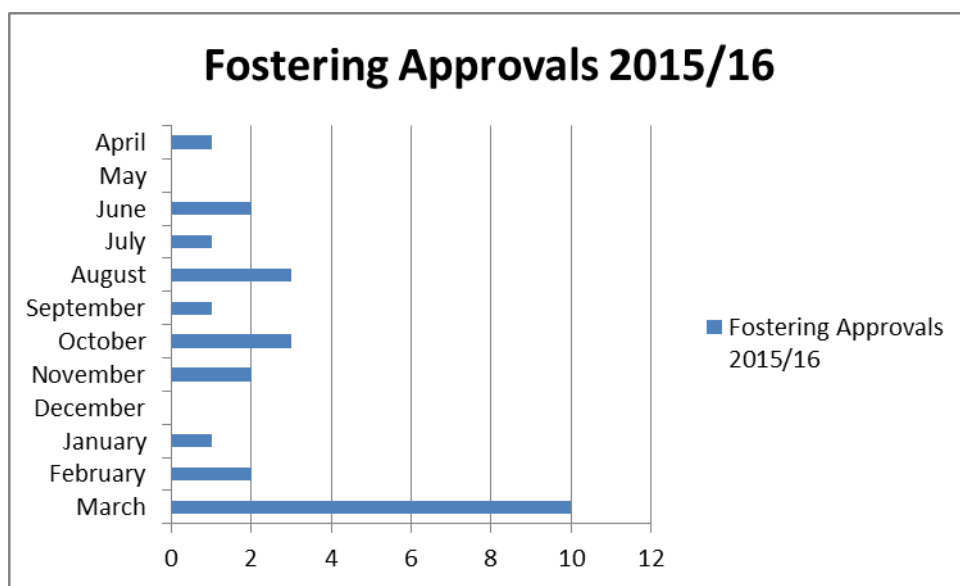
2.4 The Children in Care Council (CICC) now play a full role in contributing to the assessment, holding informal interviews with all applicants going through ESCC's foster carer approval process. 6 "Skills to Foster" pre-assessment preparation courses were held during 15-16 and 27 households have attended these courses.

2.5 26 households that offer 44 placements were approved in 2015-16. 6 of these households were transfers from independent fostering providers with 4 East Sussex looked after children already placed with these families. 2 LAC from other local authorities were also placed with these foster carers. This has brought significant income generation into the service. After the deduction of the East Sussex foster carer allowances paid to these foster carers, the transfer of these foster carers equates to a saving to ESCC of £288,305 per year in agency fees.

2.6 For 2015/16 the Fostering Service saw the loss of 24 carers which represented 8% of its total carer resource. Although this is an increase on last year's retention of just below 3%, it continues to be well below the national average of 12% last recorded. A breakdown of reasons for carers leaving ESCC include: foster carers applying for special guardianship orders and adoption orders and changes in foster carers' personal circumstances. Nearly one third of losses were due to carers deciding to retire from fostering. The Fostering Service has anticipated that there will be an increasing number of foster carers retiring given that the percentage of our foster carers over 50 years of age is high, and this is part of a wider demographic trend. The Department of Education's Local Authority Fostering Service Benchmark Report (2014) cites:

"According to the Fostering Network research, foster carers stay in their role for an average of seven and a half years. Many leave due to changes in personal circumstances or at a natural point for their time as foster carers to cease. This is often retirement age as foster carers on average are aged 50-55 years".

2.7 The diagram below illustrates the total number of carers recruited each month.



2.8 There were 14 fostering assessments still in progress at 31 March 2016. The recruitment and retention team is also following up enquiries from a further 3 fostering households currently approved by independent fostering agencies who are expressing an interest in transferring to ESCC.

2.9 The service continues to employ the marketing strategy of "continual presence". This consists of wide-ranging extensive advertising throughout the year using a range of different mediums. As the Fostering Service marketing strategy for 2015-16 has been the most high profile to date, the service is confident via its data that when residents of East Sussex want to consider fostering, it is ESCC they approach first.

Below are some examples of the mediums used to promote fostering recruitment this year:

- Bus shelters

- Local buses
- Sovereign FM Radio, Arrow FM Radio and Heart FM
- Local papers
- Lamp post banners
- 'Display vans' in both Hastings and Eastbourne
- 'Your County' magazine
- Twitter
- Facebook
- ESCC payslips

2.10 One of the new marketing initiatives in 2015/16 was the use of television advertising to produce a series of advertisements demographically targeted to recruit carers in the west and north east of the county. Although the take up was lower than predicted, the advertisement was developed so as to allow the service to retain the copyrights. The filming was re-edited to provide very effective social media clips that went across a range of popular social media sites including You-Tube and Facebook.

Recruitment Events

- Information evenings have been held monthly - 10 in Eastbourne, 1 in Hastings. The Operations Manager attended a special event with Home For Good, a charitable organisation helping to deal with the refugee crisis. Over 60 people attended and this generated 5 enquiries, one of which is currently progressing through to assessment.

Retention Events

- In October 2015, the Fostering Service in conjunction with East Sussex Foster Carer Association (ESFCA), held a 'Children Who Foster' residential trip at PGL, Windmill Hill in celebration of Sons & Daughters week. In August 2015, a picnic was held at Knockhatch for all carers of ESCC children and staff. This continues to prove to be a successful way of raising our profile with agency carers.
- In June 2015, an evening event was held at Bannatynes Spa Hotel, Hastings, to say 'Thank You' to our carers. This was attended by 130 carers and staff.
- The Fostering Service continues to send newsletters to foster carers providing up to date information on the service and looked after children and to promote the service's support groups and training events.

Advertising and Media Coverage



- This year the Fostering Service originally focussed their recruitment strategy on "Could you foster a teenager". It became apparent in the first part of the year that the take up for this age group was particularly challenging. The strategy was reviewed to refocus our target group to foster carers for all ages. The campaign of "Don't keep them waiting" proved to be more successful.

For the first time the Fostering Service was able to secure a marketing partnership with Amey, an ESCC commissioned company, with their countywide van fleet now sporting promotional fostering signage.



3. Foster Care Training

3.1 From 1st September 2015 to the 31st March 2016, 589 training places have been taken up by foster carers (last year's equivalent was 554), predicting a slight increase for the overall academic year. Evaluation of the courses by participants shows 89 % to be excellent.

3.2 New courses introduced this year have included:

- Missing and Child Sexual Exploitation.
- Prevent Awareness.
- Insiders Course, promoting foster carers' resilience.
- Fostering Changes, adolescence, addressing behaviour management strategies.
- Understanding and Supporting Lesbian and Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Unsure Children and Young People.
- Legal High Drug Awareness, prior to the law change.
- Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome.
- Understanding Autism.
- Promoting Positive Behaviours 5 day course, supporting foster carers by developing a Behaviour Support Plan.
- Adolescent Support Discussion Groups, addressing many aspects regarding looking after teenagers.
- Internet Security / Parental Controls and Filters Course.
- Digital Photo Albums.

3.3 Continual Professional Development Opportunities are also available: 15 foster carers are undertaking a variety of qualifications. These include the level 3 Diploma, Children and Young People's Workforce qualification, and the Level 3 Training, Assessment and Quality Assuring qualification in assessing occupational competence.

3.4 In recognition of the varied expertise, knowledge and skill base of some of our foster carers, it is planned to bring courses in-house. This will do two things, it will enable us to use the existing expertise, knowledge and skills of East Sussex Carers in a training role, and secondly it will be more cost effective to upskill those that need further training. To ensure the quality of training, there is an agreed framework of requirements and support identified:

- To have a minimum recognised occupational based qualification (Qualification and Credit Framework Level 3 Diploma Children and Young People Workforce).
- To attend a Train the Trainers course.
- To plan course content and delivery in conjunction with the foster carer training and development consultant.
- Quality assurance activities to be undertaken.
- To gain an education and training qualification at either level 3 or 4.

3.5 Planned courses for 2016/17 include developing:

- Internet Safety Courses, addressing primary and secondary aged children, addressing the risks and management strategies.
- Added concerns regarding the internet, CSE and Radicalisation, incorporating the Dark Web.
- Fostering Changes, under 12's course.
- Caring for asylum seeking, refugee and unaccompanied children.
- Supporting education and success, a practical approach for primary and secondary aged children.
- Promoting children and young people's health and healthy living.
- Practical skills to manage challenging behaviours.
- Discussion groups, identified subject area, supporting foster carers understanding.

3.6 As of July 2016, foster carers will be able to access the East Sussex Learning Portal, to be able to apply to the wide ranging training provided by Local Safeguarding Children's Board and Children's Services courses and to manage their own continuous professional development.

3.7 Men who Foster

The introduction of the 'Men who Foster' group in 2014 continues to be successful, now attracting a consistent membership. The subjects addressed in 2015/16 included:

- Addressing safe care issues.
- What makes a positive male role model?
- The difference between being a parent and a foster carer.
- How does fostering impact on your relationships?

4. Foster carer support and supervision

4.1 The Fostering Service currently has 292 fostering households that provide a range of placements for children and young people including parent and baby placements. Supervision and contact plans are assessed on the complexity of the children placed, taking into account the need of the foster carers and of their family. The pressures and demands over the last year on foster carers and supervising social workers (SSW) have increased, but the quality of the support provided has remained at a high standard.

4.2 Support groups are available to provide foster carers with opportunities to meet with other carers, to increase support networks and to give the opportunity for shared learning. There are four localised groups in Uckfield, Rotherfield, Eastbourne and Newhaven. There are also four themed support groups: black and minority ethnic children and young people's support group; a parent and child foster carers' support group; a support group for carers of adolescents and a 'men who foster' support group. A "Buddy" system is also available when this is required.

4.3 Further support is provided for foster carers through the Fostering Advice line - an out of hours advice line service available to all foster carers and supported lodgings providers for 365 days per year. This service is staffed by a team of 7 workers from the Fostering Service, working on a rota basis, to provide support and advice to all foster carers.

4.4 There continues to be close working relationships with LAC teams, The Child and Adolescent Mental Health service, The Virtual School and Placement Support services(PSS); all of which are invaluable to supporting foster carers in sustaining placements and endeavouring to meet the children/young people's needs.

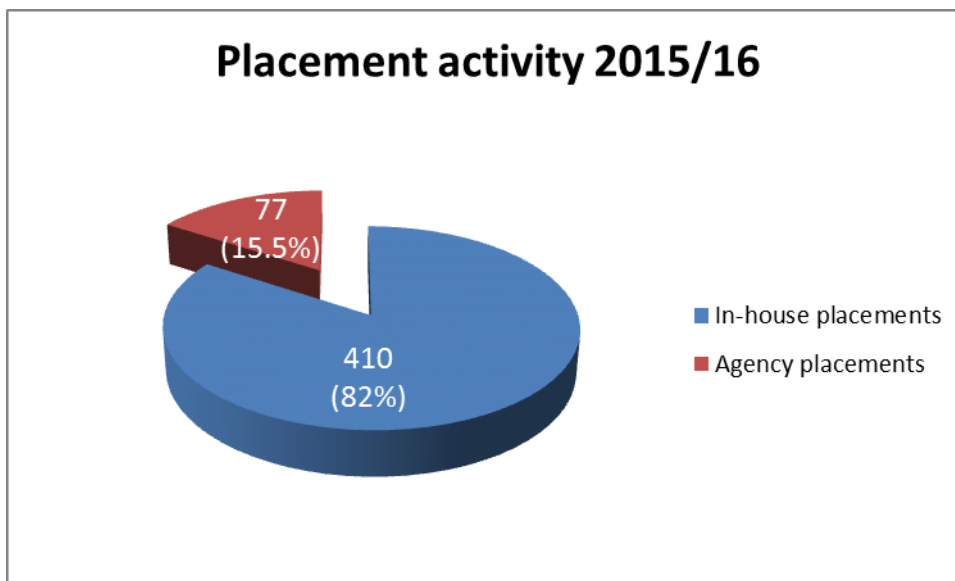
5. Health

5.1 Meeting the health needs of LAC remains a priority for the Fostering Service. In 2015/16 foster carers continued to prioritise the health needs of their children, with SSWs monitoring and supporting foster carers to ensure timely health assessments are in place, via notifications and liaison with Kent Community Health Care Trust, the designated nurse for LAC and the LAC nurses.

6. Placement Activity

6.1 On 31st March 2016 there were 498 children in foster care. 410 of these children were placed with in-house placements. This includes in-house "parent and child" placements, children subject to Special Guardianship Orders placed with foster carers and those children remaining in their "staying put" fostering placements through to independence. There were 88 fostered children placed with agency carers.

6.2 The number of East Sussex LAC placed in agency placements has decreased from 94 children (19%) in 2014/15 to 77 (15.5%) at the end of March 2016. Given the challenging matching considerations and complex needs of many of the young people for this reporting period, the Fostering Service would consider this a significant achievement.



6.3 18 young people (over 18 years of age) remain with their foster carers under the 'Staying Put' arrangements. There are also 32 children who are currently subject to Special Guardianship Orders placed with East Sussex foster carers. Fostering households also provide adoptive parents for 9 children, with one further foster carer currently undergoing an assessment to adopt a child in placement. Clearly this level of stability is very positive for individual children but it does impact on the number of placements.

6.4 Of the 459 referrals received between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016, 434 resulted in placements being made or matched. Of the 459 referrals, 153 were ultimately not required and 27 remain awaiting placement (a combination of respite and short-term placements). The figures show an efficient duty service which has converted 94% of referral to placements made/matched

which is on a par with last year's performance. In order to meet the challenge of our children with more complex and challenging needs, Fostering Duty managers have worked closely with their operational colleagues to be given advanced notice of pending placement requests.

6.5 The matching process remains vital. The ongoing challenge is that if we match children with complex needs with newly approved foster carers, an extensive support package needs to be put in place, so that foster carers are adequately supported to deal with some of our most challenging LAC.

7. Placement Support

7.1 The Placement Support Service (PSS) is currently working with 110 children, young people and their foster carers by providing targeted packages of support both short and long term. In 2015-2016, 24 new referrals were picked up by the service including life story work. 81 support packages were reviewed with 15 pieces of work ending as 'aim achieved'. PSS also responded to 65 emergency or crisis requests from carers that resulted in 141 days of support being provided.

7.2 PSS remains a vital and valued resource that provides flexible, robust and creative support to sustain the most challenging foster care placements and in preventing a move to costly agency alternatives. The following examples of feedback from carers demonstrate how much they benefit from this support:

- *'Placement Support Service is incredibly helpful and the young person comes home happy from their activities'*
- *'PSS and activities are a very valuable support for the whole family especially in the holidays.'*
- *'PSS gives us a break from our daily challenges.'*
- *'Helps the young person increase in self-confidence and raises self-esteem.'*
- *'This has helped us get through some difficult times.'*

7.3 The PSS continues its close partnership with the Looked After Children's Mental Health Service (LACAMHS) by attending their monthly multiagency meeting.

7.4 During the reporting period the Virtual School commissioned PSS staff to support 11 children with complex needs who were temporarily without education for a total of 181 days. PSS continues to maintain the positive links developed with the Virtual School who are supportive of the activities PSS provide.

7.5 The PSS provides respite holiday and weekend group activities to some LAC aged 5 to 17 during school holidays. The activities provide enriching, fun and educative experiences for children who cannot access community resources. They aim to build confidence, raise self-esteem and to reduce the stigma that some young people feel by being in care. It is a cost effective way of providing support at the most stressful periods for foster carers.

7.6 The PSS has:

- Provided 42 group activities as well as an additional 8 group Saturday activities. 10 to 15 young people attend each activity.
- Offered 451 places to children and young people. 98% of children rate the activities as good to excellent.
- Formed a positive relationship with Rhythmix, a voluntary organisation whose focus with children is music. These activities are provided free and are particularly successful for young people who find it difficult to engage in activities.
- Continued to work with St Bedes who have provided free zoo days as well as free access to their sports facilities that have also been popular.
- Negotiated free visits to the local Fire Station and to Raystede animal sanctuary. Children also regularly swim for free at Crowhurst Country Park.

8. User Participation

8.1 The Younger User group met six times during the year and following a review decided that a separate group was no longer needed. They felt that a better way of involving more junior aged children should be via SUSS IT (speak up sessions) that take place during the school holidays. This has worked well as an alternative and 29 issues for this younger group of LAC have been satisfactorily resolved. A recurring theme is a need to improving contact arrangements for children.

8.2 In April 2015 the Junior Action Day was held and 36 primary school aged children attended, the theme being Protective Behaviours.

8.3 The latest Children In Care Council (CICC) commenced on 28th September 2013 and goes from strength to strength. The CICC has decided to continue as an ongoing group in future and to replace members as necessary, rather than start afresh every three years. They have met as a group twelve times. Senior managers from the LAC service, other social work children's teams, and NYAS have also attended.

8.4 The 2015 CICC Newsletter was produced and widely distributed to children in care and professionals, as were the Children's Handbook, Pledge and CICC top tip playing cards.

8.5 During 2015-2016 the CICC/CICC coordinator attended:

- 41 holiday activities to promote Speak up Sessions (SUSS IT). 53 issues raised by looked after children were resolved as a result.
- 23 local and national meetings, events and consultations that included: meeting with the Corporate Parenting Panel, the Children's Minister, the Children's Commissioner, the local judiciary, testing the MOMO app, and meeting with a wider Pan Sussex group.
- Recruitment panels and events that included appointing the new Children's Commissioner, foster carer recruitment via Sky, and three ESCC staff recruitment panels.

CICC has attended the following personal development and training events:

- 3 members completed Level 1 Leadership training.
- 8 Completed British Youth Council Democracy Champion training.
- 7 have completed I Food Hygiene training.
- 7 attended National Takeover Day.
- 14 children are currently working on their Bronze Arts Award.
- 1 completed Basic First Aid Training.
- 2 completed SPARK representative training, a voluntary organisation set up to train volunteers who wish to do youth work.
- CICC members continue to volunteer both in the community and for ESCC.

9. Working in Partnership

ESFCA

9.1 The Operations Manager of the Fostering Service continues to attend the monthly meetings of the East Sussex Foster Care Association (ESFCA) management group to report on developments in the Fostering Service and Children's Services. This relationship is particularly significant at the moment as the association has, in the last 6 months, gone through a change of chair and trustees. The association is taking forward a new agenda for its members which includes them supporting the fostering services in its operational responsibilities, including informal support, advice and "buddying" of new carers.

9.2 The Operations Managers for Looked After Children and the Fostering Service with the Chair of the ESFCA continue to host monthly 'surgeries' for foster carers who can bring issues and problems directly to key managers.

Virtual School

9.3 Partnership work with The Virtual School continues to be very significant in the support and promotion of children's educational needs, both for their prospective and existing placements. Placement stability has a direct correlation with a young person's school placement and if the school can remain consistent when a child becomes LAC, the likelihood of placement breakdown is significantly reduced.

10. The Supported Lodgings Team

10.1 Supported lodging providers continue to offer valuable placements for LAC, care leavers and homeless young people in the East Sussex area. Over the last year we have seen an increase in the high level of care needed for very complex young people coming into placement. Our providers have demonstrated their skills, flexibility and willingness to rise to the challenge of accommodating these older looked after children.

10.2 There are currently 32 supportive provider households providing a total of 49 placements across the county. Since April 2015, 16 supported lodgings assessments have been undertaken with 9 being approved and a further 6 assessments awaiting approval.

10.3 An objective over this past year has been to encourage supported lodging providers to consider becoming approved foster carers, therefore enhancing their potential to provide placements for younger LAC. This has been successful with 4 carers now holding dual registration as foster carers and supportive lodgings providers which enables them to provide care placements for our younger and more complex and challenging Looked After Children before they become 16 years old.

10.4 During the last year, supported lodging carers have provided a number of 'step down' placements for children from in-house residential placements as well as from both agency and in-

house foster placements. Significantly, supported lodgings carers have provided 7 placements for LAC moving from expensive external residential provision at a saving of £544,195.

10.5 The Supported Lodgings Team recognise the increased pressure on the availability of supported lodgings beds. As a result the team is pushing forward with a recruitment campaign. The team regularly advertises in local newspapers and once a year in Your County magazine. This has proved to be very successful in generating new applicants and interest in the Service.

11. Summary

11.1 2015/16 has brought a number of challenges to the Fostering Service: financial constraints and the ever reducing pool of new foster carers to recruit from. Despite these challenges, the outcomes for the Fostering Service have remained strong. However, this has only been achieved by using extensive resources (more staff and management time, energy and commitment) to match our children and young people who demonstrate more risk taking behaviours and complex needs. As with last year's success, this year has been built on a strong foundation of effective support to our foster carers. Agency foster carers who have transferred to ESCC have come to us because of our reputation of supporting our foster carers well. Recruitment of new carers has been challenging not only for ESCC but also for our neighbouring partners (and nationally). All our providers, including our preferred independent foster agencies continue to struggle to recruit any new foster carers. Therefore, our focus continues to be on attracting existing approved foster carers to our authority and on developing and retaining our existing foster carers.

11.2 Our referral profiles of children requiring placements have changed considerably over the last year, with carers being asked to take on more young people with challenging and complex needs. Therefore, it is inevitable that placement breakdowns are more likely to occur. Even so, our placement stability has only seen a small increase for children who experience 3 placements or more to just above 10%. This is comparable with the national average.

11.3 The Supported Lodgings Service has built on its success from last year, making bespoke and appropriate placements for young people whilst also making significant savings. The care packages provided by this service have been excellent, giving young people the opportunity to develop independence skills with the support and supervision of care providers. The complexity of placements being taken on by the Supported Lodgings Service has necessitated access to appropriate training and support for carers, the take up of which has increased considerably during this reporting period.

11.4 We have targeted recruitment and designed our income generation programme around the recruitment of all potential local carers. These carers would then be available, not only for children in East Sussex, but could also be 'sold' to our neighbouring authorities for their use. This would give neighbouring authorities the opportunity of having good quality placements supported by East Sussex Fostering Service at a cost that is less than that of an independent fostering agency.

The Key Management Priorities for 2016-2017 include:

- To continue active recruitment and provision of high quality training and support for our carers so that stability for children is prioritised.
- To continue with an extensive and continuous recruitment strategy throughout the year to attract potential foster carers to come to East Sussex as the preferred fostering agency in this area. This will include targeted recruitment on the borders of East Sussex in order to recruit foster carers that potentially the Fostering Service could make available to our neighbouring authorities.

Adrian Sewell

Operation Manager Fostering Service

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Report to: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date: **8 July 2016**

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

Title of report: **Annual Progress Report of the East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016**

Purpose of report: **To outline the performance of the Adoption and Permanence Service between 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016**

RECOMMENDATION:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report

1. Background information

1.1 Services for adoption are supported within the base budgets for CSD. Specific post adoption support is also available in specific circumstances from the national Adoption Support Fund and it is also possible at present to recoup interagency fees for children who are deemed 'hard to place'. There are no increased costs arising from this report.

2. Supporting information

2.1 The Annual Progress report of the East Sussex Adoption Service is attached as Appendix 1

3. Recommendation

3.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report.

STUART GALLIMORE
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Carole Sykes, Operations Manager, Adoption and Permanence
Service Tel: 01323 747406

Local Members: All

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Annual Progress report of the East Sussex Adoption Service

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

Annual Progress report of the East Sussex Adoption Service

1. Supporting Information

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/2016
1. Number of Children Adopted	57	43	45
2. Number of Adoption Matches (children)	50	56	32
3. Number of Permanent Fostering Matches (children)	10	7	10
4. Number of East Sussex Adoptive Matches (children)	40	33	26
5. Number of Consortium Adoptive Matches (children)	1	6	0
6. Number of Inter-Agency Matches (children):			
Permanence:	4	3	2
Adoption:	9	17	6
7. Number of Prospective Adopters Approved (households) *	44	50	41
8. Number of Permanent Carers Approved (households)	8	4	2
9. Number of Children Approved for Adoption up to 31 st March 2016 (including 2 re-approvals)	52	43	53
10. Number of children Approved for Permanence up to 31 st March 2016	24	26	14
11. Number of Approved Adopters waiting to be Matched	17	20	22
12. Number of Disruptions presented to Panel:			
Permanence:			0
Adoptions:	1	0	1

2. Recruitment Activity

2.1 The two stage recruitment process which is now fully embedded within East Sussex County Council's (ESCC) Adoption Service, received very positive feedback from adopters during 15/16. Prospective adopters reported that they particularly appreciated the support they received during the process. Not only did ESCC's reputation as a welcoming and helpful recruitment service lead to local enquirers choosing to adopt with ESCC, it also attracted significant numbers of adopters from outside East Sussex borders which have been pursued if the geography is helpful. During this period the service continued to offer a dedicated telephone number for enquiries, a specific adoption recruitment email address and an on-line enquiry form to ensure that all enquirers received a prompt and personal service.

2.2 The time taken to approve prospective adopters was maintained at an average of nine months, from registering their interest to approval at Adoption Panel. While the service continued to explore ways to reduce this timescale where possible, it was clear that adopters taking control of the timescales during Stage 1 led to delays at this point more frequently than might have been predicted. It had been anticipated that most adopters would want to progress to approval in the quickest time possible, but in reality more applicants chose to take more time to prepare themselves for adoption. However the time taken to assess applicants in Stage 2 remained on target.

2.3 During 2015-16 the agency had 287 enquiries about adopting with ESCC. Following receipt of information packs, 81 requests were received for registration of interest forms. The conversion rate from enquiry to registration was 28%, which is a drop compared to 34% in 2014-15, however this still compares well with the Coram BAAF suggested national figures

of around 10%. While difficult to be certain, it is suspected that the reduction was due to the decision to pause accepting applications from potential adopters to adopt babies. This decision was taken in order to prioritise applications from adopters wanting to adopt older children and sibling groups. In line with the national picture, there was an increasing mismatch between adopters wishes compared with the profile of children needing placement. Consequently there was a significant drop in new registrations from December to April 2016. Given the recent rise in numbers of children being referred for an adoption placement, as well as an encouraging increase in the number of adopters matched with children, ESCC have reviewed the decision to pause applications to adopt young single children. This appears to have resulted in an immediate increase in the rate of registrations of interest from enquirers.

2.4 Throughout 15/16 the Adoption Service continued to organise regular recruitment activities for prospective adopters; profiling the range of needs of each child waiting for a placement. Advertising and recruitment activity in 2015-16 included providing information about open events on the Government Gateway, First4Adoption, New Family Social and Coram BAAF websites as well as reviewing and updating information on the ESCC website, radio advertising, and bespoke advertising on ESCC payslips, at supermarket sites, and on buses travelling around the county. The Adoption Facebook page remained popular in reaching a range of prospective adopters, particularly as it was updated regularly with information regarding local adoption services, and key national developments. Monthly information drop-in events were also held in the evenings and at weekends.

2.5 The continued trend of ESCC receiving enquiries from applicants living outside ESCC borders resulted in the service generating increased levels of income from interagency fees. Four ESCC families were 'purchased' by other local authorities in 2015-16. In addition, there have been a further 6 matches identified with other local authority children that are at various stages of progress at time of writing. All will bring income to the service should children be placed ultimately.

2.6 All recruitment processes, including stage 1 meetings and preparation to adopt courses, were reviewed during the year in order to streamline practice. A post approval training course was piloted to give adopters a better understanding of the additional attachment needs of their adopted children with tailored support strategies available at the point of placement. There was very positive feedback from this pilot and consideration is being given to setting up two six week courses in 2016-17.

2.7 During 2015-16 a further 6 experienced adopters returned for assessment, and one set of foster carers applied to be assessed as adopters for children in their care. In addition, four families were recruited to offer fostering for adoption placements for four children. Three of these four children were placed on a fostering basis with adoptive families where their siblings had previously been placed. The fourth child was placed with a childless couple willing to take the risk of offering a foster placement prior to an adoption placement being made, and subject to the Court agreeing to the care plan for adoption for the child. He has since been adopted, thus ensuring he had the minimum number of moves possible during his time in our care.

3. Children with a plan for Adoption.

3.1 The number of children with a plan for adoption increased from 43 14/15 to 53 in 15/16. This scale of increase was not reflected nationally; indeed many Adoption Agencies reported that the number of approvals for adoption had significantly decreased in favour of Special Guardianship Orders. Locally however, the courts responded to a clear Government directive which suggested that adoption should continue to be promoted as a realistic permanence option for young children at the earliest opportunity. During 15/16 28 children

were matched with local adopters, with only 2 sibling pairs placed out of county giving a total of 32 children matched in the 12 month period. There was also a marked rise in the number of sibling groups with complex permanence plans, some of which involved adoption for the younger children and permanent foster placement for the older children. These arrangements were very challenging in terms of contact and involved detailed professional and co-ordinated working across children's teams.

3.2 The family finding service was refined to more effectively co-ordinate and develop local in house provision, and explore placement options for children approved and waiting for both adoption and permanence. Improving communication between this service and the family support and looked after children's teams and resulting in timely notification of children entering the system with a possible plan for adoption minimising any potential delays. One of the greatest challenges in the past year was the number of children who remained at home during care proceedings and the impact these arrangements had on permanence planning.

3.3 The specialist recruitment and family finding staff within the adoption service worked closely together during this period to identify the types of adopters needed to meet the needs of the children coming forward. It should be noted that there was a continued rise in the number of children identified with a plan for adoption who had experienced domestic violence, trauma and loss. Many of these children will have ongoing complex therapeutic post adoption support needs in the future. During this period it was enormously beneficial to apply to the Adoption Support Fund with an identified support package for adopters and their families at the earliest stage in placement.

3.4 In November 2015 ESCC participated in an adoption activity day with our former consortium partners. Whilst there was initial interest in a number of East Sussex children sadly it did not result in any matches. However, the children have been successfully matched since with both in house and inter agency adopters.

4. Staffing

4.1 There have been a number of staffing changes over the last 12 months with a number of long standing members of the team moving on. A small number of these posts were recruited to, but 5 staffing vacancies have been held in order to manage the very difficult budget position the council found itself in during 15/16.

5. Permanence

5.1 The Adoption & Permanence Service continued to use targeted family finding for those children with a plan for permanent fostering; particularly those children with complex needs or who were part of a sibling group. The permanence tracking workshop met regularly during 15/16 to monitor closely the timescale of permanence plans and ensure suitable matches were progressed.

5.2 The service had a number of in-house foster carers who were willing to put themselves forward to offer long term care to children already in placement with them, or for those for whom they have expressed a specific interest. This was particularly advantageous for those children who had been "claimed" by the foster carers, and for those children who had expressed a clear wish to remain in that placement. The number of children approved for permanence reduced from 26 in 14/15, to 14 in 15/16. At year end there were 12 children with a plan for permanence for whom the service was actively family finding, this included four sets of sibling pairs.

6. Adoption Support

6.1 Between April 2015 and March 2016 there were 36 requests from adopters for post adoption support assessments. Of these, 28 resulted in the provision of support. At year

end, 141 families were in receipt of post adoption support packages. This represents a significant increase on last year.

6.2 The specially commissioned CAMHS service for adopted children and their families 'AdCAMHS' was funded by the Local Authority CAMHS grant throughout 15/16. The aim of the service was to offer post adoption support to families with dedicated therapy and consultation services. The service was commissioned to work with 40 families at any one time, however there are currently 68 cases open to the service. The service was designed to contribute to adoption stability, promote positive attachments within adoptive families and ultimately to prevent placement breakdown. There was clear evidence collected by the service which indicated that these interventions had had a very positive impact on placement stability.

6.3 The adoption service also commissioned individual therapists to provide specialist support to families in areas such as therapeutic life story work and 'Theraplay'. Play, Drama and Music therapies were identified as effective tools in enabling children to communicate and express themselves more creatively. There were also a number of adoption cases where child to parent violence was identified as a key factor and a systemic family therapist was commissioned, with expertise in the 'Non Violent Resistance' (NVR) approach, to offer advice and interventions to families. These interventions were all funded by applications to the national Adoption Support Fund (ASF)

6.4 Excellent links were maintained with the Virtual School, who continued to fund two part time adoption support workers within the service. These roles provided adoptive families with support for educational and school-based issues, in order to promote the educational achievements of adopted children within East Sussex. The Virtual School also offered advice and guidance to schools in drawing down the Pupil Premium for adopted children. Training for schools on attachment and on the needs of adoptive children in an education setting, was identified as a key area of intervention.

6.5 Closer collaborative links between the Adoption Support Team and Locality Services, particularly with the Duty and Assessment, Family Support, Youth Support and Targeted Youth Support teams were forged, enabling a more seamless service to be provided to families when a family assessment was required. In complex adoption support cases, a team around the child, particularly though not exclusively in adolescence, is vital in managing risk and safeguarding issues as well as preventing some of our young people returning to care.

6.6 During the last 12 months, the Adoption Support Team facilitated a group for adopted children aged 10-12 years, and 2 groups for adoptive teenagers facilitated jointly with AdCAMHS. A further 12 week therapeutic parenting programme was successful in bringing adopters together to focus on adoption issues with the support of two child and adolescent psychotherapists, also under the umbrella of AdCAMHS. ESCC continued with its contract with Adoption UK to deliver support to adopters and funded four support groups at different locations across East Sussex. This contract was regularly monitored and reviewed by the adoption service and evaluated by service users.

6.7 The Adoption Service also maintained its close working relationship with the Adoptive Families Group (AFG), set up in January 2013. This is an independent adopter-led group which focuses on lobbying and raising the profile of the needs of adoptive families both locally and nationally. During this period AFG focused on education, the use of Pupil

Premium and raising awareness of the Adoption Support Fund in relation to therapeutic support.

6.8 The Adoption Service has continued to commission the services of CMB Counselling (a small independent agency) to provide an intermediary service to adopted adults and their relatives, and the Adoption Support Team provided a service to adopted adults wishing to access their records. In March 2016, 45 families were in receipt of adult adoptees support packages (not one off advice).

6.9 The adoption service in 2015/2016 held two events for adoptive families. These were social events organised and supported by the service, and designed to enable adopters and their children to meet informally and have a fun day out. These events were well received and attended.

6.10 The same sex adopters group met on a regular basis with speakers in attendance from time to time.

6.11 The direct contact service supported 300 arrangements during 15/16, and a further 781 indirect contact agreements; both of which demonstrate a substantial increase on 14/15. This aspect of the service requires a high level of professional scrutiny as well as dedicated full-time administrative support.

6.12 In 15/16 the Adoption Service trained a caseworker to become a licensed practitioner in the use of 'THRIVE', funded through Pupil Premium. THRIVE is a systemic approach used in relation to the early identification of emotional developmental need in children. It has been used increasingly in schools to help children in their relationships with others and equips them to be open to learning. There were also several THRIVE workshops commissioned for adopters, funded via the Adoption Support Fund.

6.13 The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) was rolled out nationally in May 2015 (following the prototype phase which involved East Sussex). As part of its programme of adoption reform, the Government made a financial commitment to fund the ASF until the end of this parliament. This was an acknowledgement of the need to strengthen arrangements for adoption support. The ASF is available specifically for the provision of therapeutic support. Since the roll out of the fund, the scope has broadened for 16/17 with the eligibility to include children from the time of placement in their adoptive families, intercounty adoptions and Special Guardianship. Since the national roll out of the ASF, East Sussex made 64 applications to the fund and the total agreed is £219,965.80.

7. Adoption & Permanence Panel

7.1 There have been a number of changes to the membership of the Adoption and Permanence Panels during 15/16, but quoracy was maintained. Panel processes and venues were reviewed during this period in order that best value for money was achieved, and savings made. This resulted in a change to the venue, a reduction in the frequency of Panel meetings and all panel members now receive their papers electronically. A very successful Panel training event took place in September 2015 facilitated by Elaine Dibben from Coram BAAF. The topic of Adoption Matching was enthusiastically discussed.

7.2 Kent Health Care Trust (KHCT) were commissioned for 15/16 to deliver all medical advice to the Panels, and all initial health assessments and adoption medicals for Looked after Children. They encountered a number of personnel issues during this timeframe which resulted in the emergency appointment of a number of locum staff. At year end KHCT were

in the process of recruiting to two permanent medical advisor posts specifically to work with ESCC children and the Adoption Panel.

8. Consortium & Regionalisation

8.1 For 12 years East Sussex was a member of the South East Regional Consortium together with Brighton and Hove, Bromley, Bexley, Kent and Medway. Brighton and Hove left the consortium in July 2014, and Kent's position changed following the differently commissioned relationship with Coram. Medway, Bexley and Bromley forged links with Central London local authorities. In Jan 2015 ESCC joined the South Central Consortium in together with a number of South Eastern local authorities and PACT, a voluntary adoption agency. In April 2015 the government and DfE announced the introduction of Regional Adoption Agencies whereby existing consortium arrangements were reviewed. There was an expectation that all local authorities would join together in regions to submit a bid to become a new entity, and that it should include at least one voluntary agency. ESCC were instrumental in compiling a bid together with Brighton & Hove, Surrey and West Sussex. This was submitted in September 2015 but was not successful. However, the four local authorities have continued to work closely together, developed a senior management board and an operational group to drive forward this agenda under the banner of Adopt South East.

9. Management Priorities 2016/17

- Using the expertise developed in ESCC's outstanding Adoption Service to drive forward adoption recruitment, practice innovation and collaboration both locally and across the region, with a view to generating income or attracting grant funding.
- Consolidate targeted recruitment of adopters for ESCC children, whilst maintaining a strategy of over recruitment in order to release additional resources/funds particularly in the Southern region.
- Work together with other Local Authority partners in Surrey, Brighton & Hove and West Sussex to develop an effective region. Ensure regional developments bring added value to the service and greater local placement choice for children.
- Update and revise policies and procedures in accordance with new regulations and strategy guidance.
- Maintain and extend adoption support developments, including the revised CAMHS contract and close partnerships with the Virtual School. Ensure continued use of the Adoption Support Fund to full effect.
- Ensure the contract with KHCT maintains a good standard of medical support across Adoption and Fostering Services.

Carole Sykes.
Operations Manager,
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