



CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

FRIDAY, 26 JULY 2019

10.00 AM COMMITTEE ROOM, COUNTY HALL, LEWESS

MEMBERSHIP - Councillors Charles Clark, Chris Dowling, Kathryn Field, Jim Sheppard, Colin Swansborough, Sylvia Tidy (Chair) and Francis Whetstone

A G E N D A

- 1 Minutes of the meeting held on 26 April 2019 (*Pages 3 - 6*)
- 2 Apologies for absence
- 3 Disclosure of Interests
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.
- 4 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.
- 5 Exclusion of Press and Public
To consider excluding the public and press from the meeting for the next two 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.
- 6 Ofsted Inspection reports for the following: Lansdowne, Brodrick House and Hazel Lodge (*Pages 7 - 28*)
- 7 Children's Home Regulations 2015, Regulation 44: Inspection reports for April 2019 - June 2019
 - 7a Acorns at Dorset Road (*Pages 29 - 108*)
 - 7b Brodrick House (*Pages 109 - 192*)
 - 7c Hazel Lodge (*Pages 193 - 288*)
 - 7d Homefield Cottage (*Pages 289 - 378*)
 - 7e Lansdowne Secure Unit (*Pages 379 - 480*)
 - 7f The Bungalow, Sorrel Drive (*Pages 481 - 574*)
- 8 Any other exempt items considered urgent by the Chair.

- 9 Annual progress report of the East Sussex Fostering Service (*Pages 575 - 590*)
Report by the Director of Children's Services
- 10 Annual progress report of the East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service (*Pages 591 - 600*)
Report by the Director of Children's Services
- 11 Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2018/19 (*Pages 601 - 618*)
Report by the Director of Children's Services
- 12 Looked After Children (LAC) Statistics (*Pages 619 - 622*)
Report by Director of Children's Services.
- 13 Any other non-exempt items considered urgent by the Chair.

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

18 July 2019

Contact officer:

Aaron Sams - Democratic Services Officer

Telephone: 01273 335274

Email: aaron.sams@Eastsussex.gov.uk

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held in the Committee Room, County Hall, Lewes on 26 April 2019.

PRESENT Councillors Colin Swansborough, Sylvia Tidy,
Francis Whetstone, Martin Clarke and Angharad Davies

ALSO PRESENT Liz Rugg – Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care
Teresa Lavelle-Hill – Head of LAC Services
Nicola Scott – Operations Manager, Residential LAC Services
Mandy Lewis – Head of Virtual School
Beverley Moores – Strategic Lead, Children’s Disability Social Care ISEND
Janet Fairless – RHM Homefield Cottage
Scott Lipa – RHM Brodrick House
Helen Simmons – RHM Lansdowne Secure Unit
Charlotte De Retuerto – RHM The Bungalow
Shirin White- RHM Acorns
Dr Katy Arsharpad – Designated Doctor for LAC
Dr Susan Leather – Designated Doctor for LAC

1 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 JANUARY 2019

1.1 RESOLVED to agree as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2019.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2.1 Apologies were received from Councillor Jim Sheppard, Councillor Kathryn Field, Councillor Chris Dowling, Councillor Charles Clark and Ian Williams, Registered Home Manager for Hazel Lodge.

2.2 Councillor Martin Clarke and Councillor Angharad Davies were present as substitute members.

2.3 The Panel welcomed Dr Katy Arsharpad who has been appointed as the new Designated Doctor for Looked After Children (LAC)

3 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

3.1 There were none.

4 URGENT ITEMS

4.1 There were none.

5 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

5.1 The Panel agreed to exclude the press and public for the next 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.

6 OFSTED INSPECTION REPORTS FOR THE FOLLOWING:

6.1 The Panel received an Ofsted report on The Bungalow at Sorrell Drive.

6.2 The Panel discussed the outcome of the Ofsted report and were informed by the Registered Home Manager of the actions that have been taken forward since the visit. These actions included: a successful staff recruitment drive and a new process in place to improve record keeping. The Panel welcomed the positive actions being taken forward.

6.3 RESOLVED: to note the reports.

7 CHILDREN'S HOME REGULATIONS 2015, REGULATION 44: INSPECTION REPORTS FOR JANUARY 2019 TO MARCH 2019

7.1 The Panel considered Regulation 44 Reports for the period January 2019 to March 2019 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, Sorrell Drive

7.2 Each Registered Home Manager (RHM) gave a verbal update on activity at the home covering the period since the last Panel meeting.

7.3 The Panel were informed about the progress of the building improvements being made at the Registered Homes and welcomed the introduction of Mobile Maintenance Officers to address building issues.

7.4 The Panel commended the hard work of all staff at the homes.

7.5 RESOLVED: to note the reports.

8 ANY OTHER EXEMPT ITEMS CONSIDERED URGENT BY THE CHAIR.

8.1 There were none.

9 BRIGHT SPOTS SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS - PRESENTATION

9.1 The Panel received a presentation from Mandy Lewis, Head of the Virtual School, detailing the results from the Bright Spots survey which was conducted by the children's charity Coram and the University of Bristol. The survey asked a range of questions to Looked After Children (LAC) about their experiences in care.

9.2 The Panel were informed that all LAC aged 4 to 18 in East Sussex were invited to respond to the survey. The response rate was 39% which the Panel were informed accounted for over a third of all LAC and that compared to similar surveys in other local authorities this was a high response rate.

9.3 The Panel welcomed the many positive outcomes of the survey, these included:

- 89% of LAC in East Sussex felt that their lives were improving.
- 90% of LAC in East Sussex felt safe 'all or most of the time' in their placements. The Panel were informed that this level is higher than the general population of 8 to 13 year olds which another survey found to be 75%.
- 93% of LAC aged 11-18 reported that they could easily get in contact with their social workers.
- In East Sussex, the turnover of social workers is lower than in other authorities. 11% of young people wrote that they had had three or more social workers in the previous year. This is significantly less than in other authorities where on average 28% young people reported this.
- Children and young people in East Sussex were more likely than their peers in the general population to report that their carers showed an interest in their education.
- In comparison to their peers in the general population, higher proportions of children and young people in care in East Sussex had access to nature. The Panel discussed the mental and physical benefits of this.

9.4 The Panel also discussed the areas for improvement that the survey highlighted, these included:

- **Bullying:** The Panel questioned that outcome that 45% of LAC surveyed aged 8 to 11 reported that they were afraid 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes' of bullying. In response Mandy Lewis explained to the Panel that this question was not necessarily indicative of the amount of children that experienced bullying, but rather the amount of children that are fearful of being bullied. The Panel were also informed of the steps being taken to address the issue of bullying in schools, which included: explaining to schools what is being reported by children; ensuring that schools have policies in place to support the emotional and mental health of LAC; making sure that children have someone they can talk to in confidence about bullying and including information on mental and emotional wellbeing as part of PSHE (Personal, Social, Health Education).
- **Stigma:** The Panel also discussed the finding that 15% of LAC aged 11 to 18 surveyed reported that adults did things that made them feel embarrassed about being in care. Liz Rugg, Assistant Director for Early Help and Social Care informed the Panel that stigma of being in care is an ongoing national issue and that there are measures that are being taken to address this in East Sussex. For example, LAC are no longer taken out of school classes for meetings during the day; steps such as this ensure that LAC

are treated equally to other young people and extra attention is not unnecessarily drawn to them.

- **Self-esteem:** The Panel were informed that the survey found that 22% of LAC between the ages of 11 to 18 were unhappy with how they looked, this is compared to 10% in the general population. Members discussed the role of social media and how this is having an impact of young people's body image.

9.5 The Panel welcomed the positive outcomes of the survey and noted the Departments comments and actions towards the areas where it is seeking to make further improvements.

9.6 RESOLVED: to note the report.

10 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) STATISTICS

10.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided an update on Looked After Children (LAC) statistics.

10.2 The Panel were informed by Liz Rugg, Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care on the slight reduction in the number of East Sussex LAC since the last quarter.

10.3 RESOLVED: to note the report.

11 ANY OTHER NON-EXEMPT ITEMS CONSIDERED URGENT BY THE CHAIR.

11.1 There were none.

The meeting ended at 11.50 am.

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of the Local Government Act 1972.

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AGENDA ITEM:

Report to: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date: 26 July 2019

By: Director of Children's Services

Title of report: Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Fostering Service
01 April 2018 – 31 March 2019

Purpose of report: To outline the performance of the Fostering Service between
01 April 2018 – 31 March 2019

RECOMMENDATION:

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

1 Background information

1.1 The Annual Progress report of the East Sussex Fostering Service is attached as Appendix 1.

2 Recommendation

2.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to comment on and note the contents of the report.

STUART GALLIMORE

Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Adrian Sewell – Operations Manager, Fostering Team

Tel. No: 01323 463121

Adrian.sewell@eastsussex.gov.uk

Local Members:

All

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Fostering Service 01 April 2018 – 31 March 2019

Background documents

None

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 which are addressed fully throughout the report. The core functions are as listed:

- Recruitment and retention
- Assessment
- Supervision and review
- Foster carer training
- The matching and placing of children and young people with foster carers and supported lodgings providers.

2. Recruitment and Retention of Carers

2.1 The national challenge of recruiting foster carers was reflected locally and continued throughout 2018/19. Although The Fostering Service met this challenge with a robust and effective recruitment campaign and exceeded the recruitment achievements of its neighbouring authorities, the final number recruited for this period did fall short of expectations and of what we need. The summer of 2018 saw an Ofsted inspection of our Looked After Children's services (LAC) during which inspectors acknowledged the national challenge of foster carer recruitment and congratulated East Sussex County Council (ESCC) on their outcomes despite these pressures.

2.2 The numbers of LAC being placed with independent fostering agencies (IFA's) remained at similar levels as in 2017-8. The service continues to invest time and effort into encouraging IFA carers to transfer to East Sussex. Although this year saw 2 households transferring to ESCC, not all IFA carers completed the process due to IFA's using added incentives to retain them, such as increased allowances and offers of further placements.

2.3 Efficient assessment processes and tight timescales to approval continue to be an important factor in attracting carers to ESCC. An audit of our foster carer approvals over this period sees The Fostering Service retaining its timescale of assessments of 6-8 months.

2.4 From 1 April 2018 – 31 March 2019, 266 new enquiries were received which led to 118 screening calls and 70 initial visits to prospective foster carers. Although 2018-19 saw the number of new enquiries fall as compared with the 2017-18 figures of 346 these enquiries translated into a larger number of completed fostering approvals. This would evidence that The Fostering Service's marketing strategy is attracting applicants with the vocation and skills to complete the process of approval.

2.5 'Skills to Foster' is an integral part of the approval process giving prospective foster carers an opportunity to meet and train with other applicants. There were 5 'Skills to Foster' pre-assessment preparation courses held during 2018/19 and 29 households attended. During the assessment process, the Children in Care Council (CICC) continued to play an active role by holding sets of informal interviews with applicants and providing feedback for the final assessment report.

2.6 21 households offering 36 placements were approved in 2018/19 compared with 19 households offering 37 placements in 2017/18. 1 of these households was an agency foster carer transferring from an Independent Fostering Agency (with an ESCC child in placement), and a further foster carer transferring from another local authority offering a placement for 3 young people. There were a further 14 assessments that were allocated for assessment and booked for presentation to the Fostering Panel that unfortunately did not progress. The reasons were as follows:

- 8 cases where the applicants withdrew due to changes in their personal circumstances. However 5 of these situations will see these applicants returning to East Sussex once the issues in their personal circumstances have been addressed.
- 1 case where the applicant, after an incentive from their IFA decided to remain with their agency.
- 1 case closed by The Fostering Service due to the information received at stage 1 of the assessment.
- 2 cases where The Fostering Service decided to suspend the application due to the needs of the children within their own family.
- 2 cases where The Fostering Service was unable to evidence that the applicants met the required standards of schedule 3 of the fostering regulations.

2.7 There were 9 fostering assessments in progress as of the 31 March 2019 booked onto the Skills to Foster courses in May and July 2019.

2.8 During 2018-19 the retirement figure for existing foster carers stabilised (compared to 2017-18 where 22 foster carers retired), with the service only losing 10 carers. The total figure of carers lost for 2018-19 was 17 and the reasons were as follows:

- Retirement - 10
- Divorce – 1
- Termination of approval following standards of care investigation – 4
- Foster carers obtaining special guardianship order – 1
- Terminal illness – 1

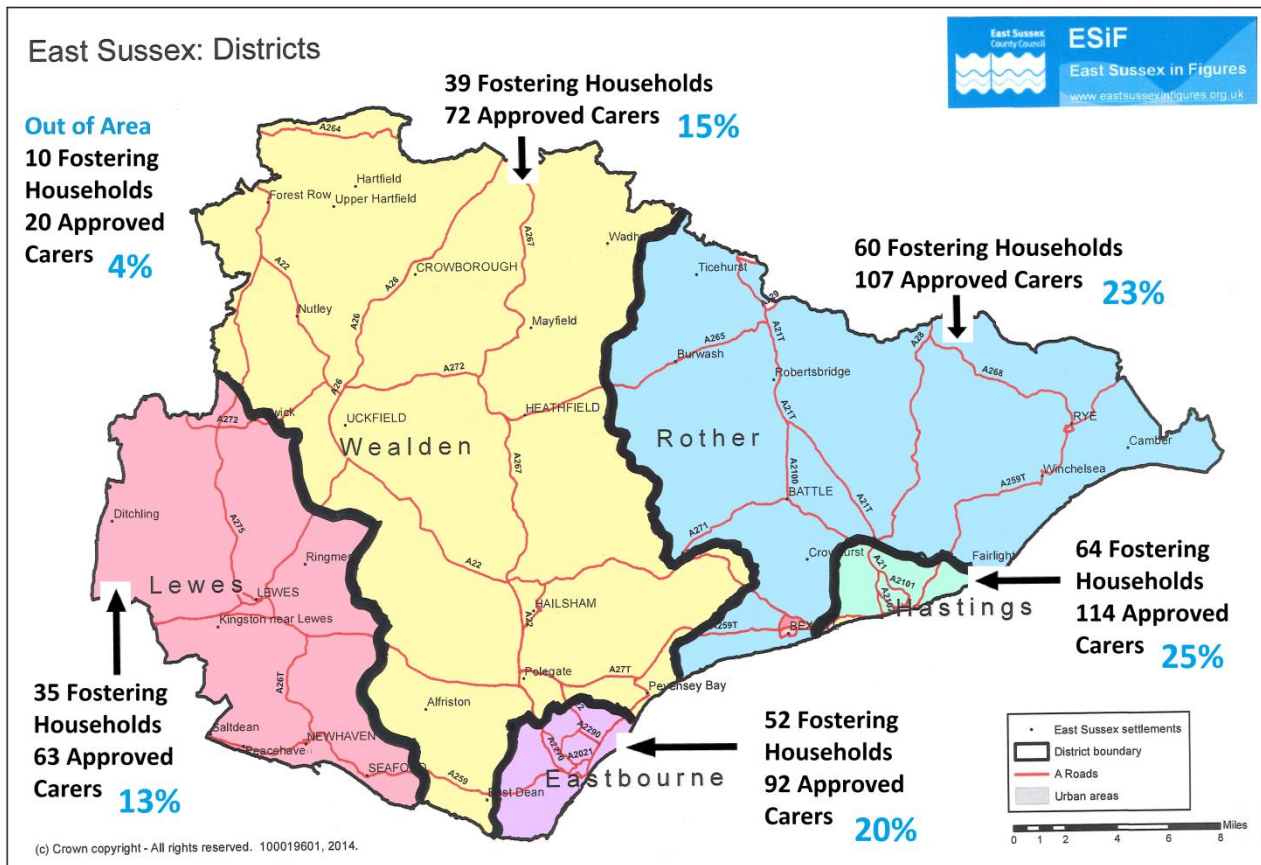
2.9 With the approvals of 21 new fostering households, The Fostering Service saw a net increase in its resources. Given the challenges experienced nationally for the recruitment of foster carers, a net gain of resources would evidence effective recruitment and retention strategies.

2.10 The marketing strategy for The Fostering Service remains one of “continual presence”. The Fostering Service has built on its existing strong partnership with ESCC communications department. Analysis of the effectiveness of The Fostering Service’s social media campaign has shown this to be effective in generating enquiries. Our fostering and supported lodgings branding of “foster with trust” and “support with trust” has been effectively used in all our purchased advertising promotions. Below are some of the examples of the mediums and events used to promote the recruitment of foster carers.

- Monthly information evenings promoted by advertising in the Herald, Hastings Observer, and Sussex Express ran from April to September 2018
- Weekly information events – The recruitment information van visited locations in October 2018 – March 2019, promoted on Facebook, twitter and the ESCC website
- Editorial in local press
- Roundabout advertising
- Google ‘ad words’ (search engine marketing)
- Heart radio campaign
- Promotional merchandise ‘giveaways’ (Mugs, pens, bags etc.)
- Lamppost banners across Eastbourne town centre and seafront
- Radio interviews – Supported Lodgings provider and The Fostering Service Operations Manager
- ESCC intranet editorial
- Applicants having a choice of how to enquire – text, email, telephone call, form on website or visiting our recruitment information van

2.11 The geography of East Sussex has always been a challenge for foster carer recruitment. The map below confirms that recruitment still remains most active along the county’s coastal strip

and within its two major conurbations of Hastings and Eastbourne (45% of all households). Previously effective, recruitment promotions within the rural districts of the authority has been a challenge. In September 2018 the service purchased a long wheel-based vehicle liveried in The Fostering Service and Supported lodgings branding (pictured). 'Vinny' now regularly presents in a number of predetermined locations (including rural locations), around the country and by invitation at events and shows.



"Vinny the van" has been able, not only to allow members of the public access to fostering professionals and foster carers who accompany "Vinny" on his travels, but also to act as an effective mobile billboard. It needs to be recognised that this medium is also very financially efficient. This has also enabled The Fostering and Supported Lodgings Services to work together.

3. The Fostering Panel

3.1 ESCC Fostering Panel continues to meet on a monthly basis. Panel activity included 21 new approvals, 22 initial annual foster care reviews and 2 standards of care reviews. The stability

and experience of its membership continues to provide those attending panel with a high level of advice, support and professional curiosity.

4. Retention Events

4.1. In May 2018, an evening event was held at Powder Mills to say “Thank You” to our foster carers. This was attended by 161 carers and staff compared with 120 carers in May 2017. This remains a significant event in the foster carer’s calendar and provides an opportunity for ESCC carer’s exceptional commitment to our looked after children being acknowledged by the Director of Children’s Services director and our Lead Member for Children and Families.

4.2. In August 2018, all foster carers and their families caring for East Sussex children were invited to a picnic at Knockhatch. Both children’s social workers and supervising social workers attended. Independent fostering agency foster carers were also invited to give them the opportunity to meet ESCC foster carers and staff, and to find out more about the service. This is a popular and well attended event. This was attended by 161 children, 98 foster carers and 25 staff.

4.3 In October 2018, the children of our foster carers were invited to a weekend at PGL Activity Centre. This was organised by the East Sussex Foster Care Association (ESFCA) who worked in partnership with The Fostering Service to facilitate this event. Staff and managers spend time with the children of our foster carers in order to further forge the relationship between foster carers and social workers.

5. Training

5.1 From 01 April 2018 to the 31 March 2019, 876 training places have been taken up by foster carers (as compared to last year’s equivalent of 773), evidencing strong and continued interest in training. Overall, the evaluations of the courses by participants were rated as excellent. Attendance to courses has significantly improved with the launch of a Reminder Text Service.

5.2 New courses introduced this year have included:

- Understanding The Teenage Brain & Behaviours
- Advanced Attachment – The Neuroscience Theory of Attachment
- Understanding the Dark Web - (8+)
- Dyadic Developmental Psychology (DDP) & Attachment Focused Therapy
- Delegated Authority
- County Lines & Cuckooing
- Gang Culture
- The Montessori Method
- Developmental Trauma & Understanding Hidden Trauma
- Loss, Grief and the Childs View
- Dealing with Difficult Discussions
- The Resilient Foster Carer
- Supporting your own Children

5.3 The Fostering Service has continued in 2018/19 to use the extensive skills, knowledge and expertise of foster carer trainers from a variety of backgrounds to deliver some of its courses. These courses included:

- Parenting traumatised children
- Practical skills to help children protect themselves
- Using visuals to help communication
- Advanced Attachment – The Neuroscience Theory of Attachment
- Safer care
- The Montessori Method

- Developmental Trauma & Understanding Hidden Trauma

5.4 Foster carers have found that courses being led by their peers offer an empathy and understanding that benefits their learning. This model of delivery also provides a more cost effective way to up-skill those foster carers that need further training. To ensure the quality of training, 13 foster carers are undertaking a variety of qualifications. These include the level 3 diploma 'Children and Young People's Workforce' qualification, and level 3 certificate in 'Assessing Vocational Achievement'. There are also 6 dedicated foster carers involved in the delivery and assessment of the 'Children and Young People's Workforce' qualification.

5.5 Foster carer training has been central in promoting the resilience of foster carers and their families. Courses have included, Fostering Changes, Resilient Foster Carer and How to Support Your Own Children. In addition specific training and support has been offered to the sons and daughters of foster carers, including the creation of a 'Young People Who Foster Council', which currently has 10 members. This Council meets on a monthly basis, giving the young people an opportunity to 'have their say' on fostering, how it impacts on their lives and to identify their training and support needs. There have been a number of activities for all children over the age of 7 years, with an emphasis on safe care principles and the importance of communication. Each activity has been well attended and the feedback from the young people and parents has been positive, identifying the importance for such support.

5.6 Proposed new courses for 2019/20 include:

- Complexities of Child Mental Health
- Meditation / Mindfulness
- Lego Therapy
- Post Effects of Child Sexual Abuse and Understanding Them
- Alternatives to GCSE Qualifications
- What to do when a Child is Excluded
- CBT for Children

5.7 Additionally, Microsoft Office 365 will be introduced to all its foster carers, enabling the service to share latest guidance, research, informative articles and online free training sites.

5.8 To compensate for reductions in the training budget, identified training has been actively promoted to other agencies for income generation opportunities. This has been successful throughout the year with a number of local authorities and agencies commissioning our services, bringing an income of £4k so far.

6. Foster carer support and supervision

6.1 The demand on ESCC foster carers remains high with 451 children placed with our in-house foster carers as of the 31 March 2019 (this figure includes children who are subject o Staying Put arrangements and subject to SGO's). In order to manage the demand of children requiring placements, the service has again relied on its fostering carers agreeing to variation of their approval (children being placed outside of their number or age of approval) or by exemption of their approval (three or more children in placement at any one time). All exemptions and variations have management oversight of the Operational Manager and Agency Decision Maker. When exemptions and variations are in place, there is an increased expectation of additional supervision and a higher level of support to be provided from The Fostering Service. This has placed increased pressure on supervising social workers to work with foster carers and social workers to maintain placement stability.

6.2 During 2018-19 The Fostering Service reviewed it allowances paid to all foster carers and supported lodgings carers in partnership with the ESFCA and recommended an uplift to elected members which was accepted. As a result, on 01/04/2019 all foster carer allowances were given a 3% uplift. This increase has been welcomed by foster carers via the East Sussex Foster Care

Association, with carers acknowledging that such a reward at a time of financial challenges for the authority is a positive recognition of their contribution to our children.

6.3 Support groups continue to be a large part of the service's support strategy. There continue to be 3 localised groups in Uckfield, Eastbourne and Newhaven. There are also three themed support groups: a parent and child foster carer's support group; a support group for carers of adolescents and a 'Men who Foster' support group. The group set up for female carers which was founded last year is receiving excellent feedback and good attendance.

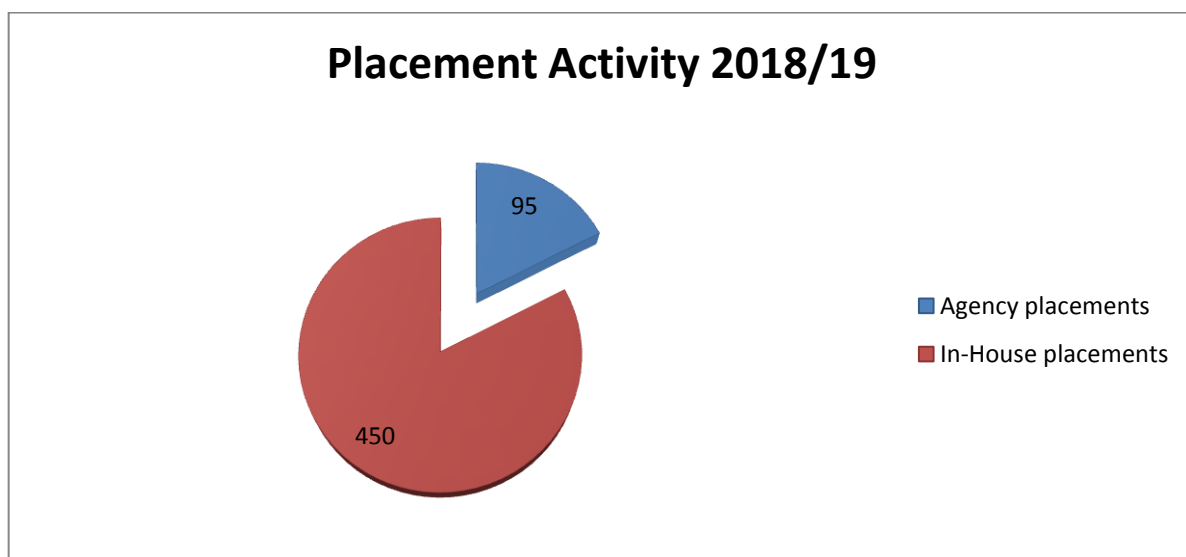
6.4 "Buddying" has increased the number of mentors available to the service whereby experienced carers provide much needed support to foster carers coping with the challenges of issues such as attachment behaviours and allegations.

6.5 Further support is provided for foster carers through the fostering advice line. This is an out of hour's service, available to all foster carers and supported lodgings providers for 365 days per year. This service is staffed by a team of social workers from The Fostering Service who work on a rota basis, to provide support and advice to all foster carers. The service deals with a range of issues such as placement disruptions, children and young people missing from placement, police involvement or generally supporting carers in managing challenging behaviours presented by our children or young people. The advice line has seen a decrease in activity in 2018/19, taking 307 calls in comparison with 2017/18's figure of 378. This may be attributed to foster carers being able to seek out of hours support more readily from peers (buddies).

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

7. Placement activity

7.1 On 31st March 2019 there were 585 children and young people living in foster homesⁱ. 450 of these children were placed with in-house foster carers. This includes in-house parent and child placements, children subject to Special Guardianship Orders placed with foster carers and those older young people remaining in their 'Staying Put' fostering placements through to independence. The commissioning of external IFA placements remains at a similar level to that of 2017-18 with the total figure of mainstream LAC agency foster placements at 80. (The figure below of 95 includes Unaccompanied Asylum seeking young people and specialist agency foster placements for children with disabilities) .



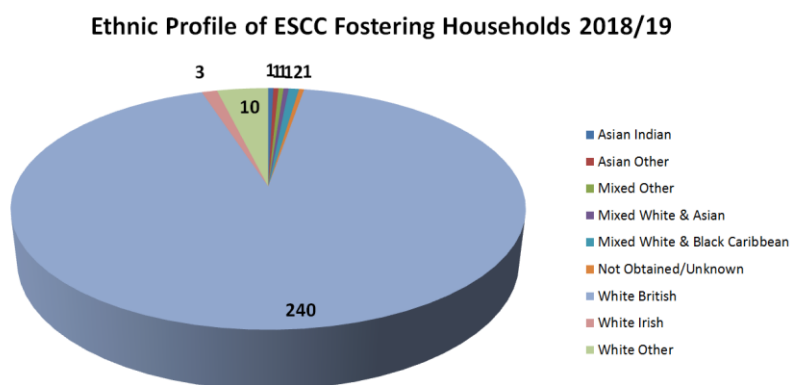
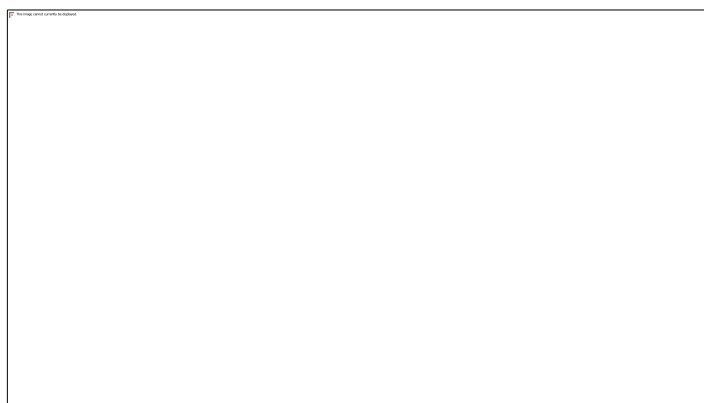
7.2 As of 31 March 2019, 31 young people (Between 18 and 25 years of age) remain with their foster carers under 'Staying Put' arrangements. This figure is a 50% increase on last year and

indicates that the Staying Put provision is starting to influence carer's decisions to help young people make the transition to independence. There are also 26 children who are currently subject to Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) placed with East Sussex foster carers. This figure remains similar to 2017/18 and indicates that although there have been a number of new SGOs granted to carers, there have also been a number of young people subject to SGO who have now reached 18.

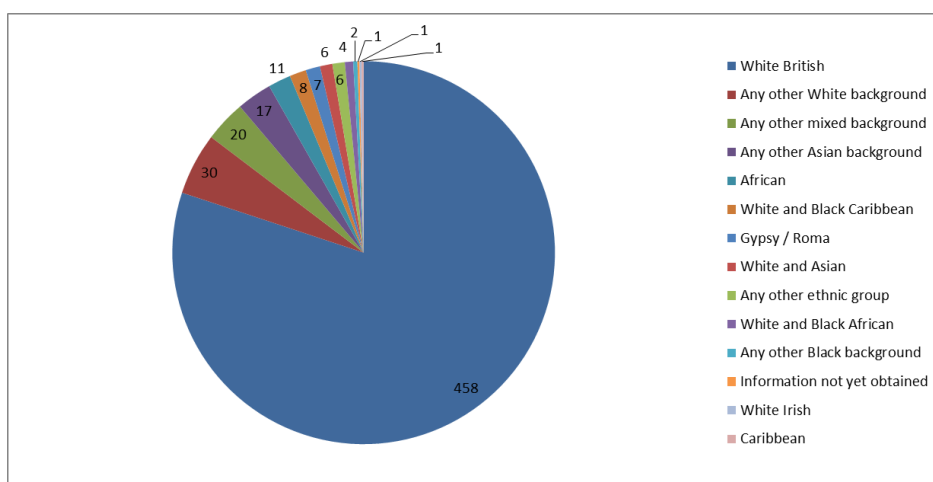
7.3 The Fostering Duty team is an extremely busy service providing a centralised service for the placement and commissioning of all placements for looked after children. The service often has to respond to emergency duty and same day placements (immediate safeguarding concerns), placing children subject to care proceedings as well as to the disruption of existing placements with very complex children and young people presenting with very challenging behaviours. Such disruptions will involve searching for an alternative placement which is hugely time consuming and may involve speaking to over 25 to 40 carers or external providers. The duty team are involved in the matching of children, quality assuring all independent fostering and residential placements and often sensitive negotiations regarding costs. The Fostering Duty team received 532 referrals between 01 April 2018 and 31 March 2019. The team worked on a total of 608 placements, 121 of which were not required. 487 placements were made overall with 398 placements made in-house.

8. Ethnic Profile of Carers and Referrals

8.1 ESCC is acknowledged as an authority with a lower than average diversity within its population. The charts below show our foster carer population to be primarily White British. However, our referrals received for placements of children who are other than White British are proportionally higher than the number placements available with carers of diverse backgrounds and matching ethnicity is not always possible.



8.2 To give context to the above, the chart below is an illustration of the ethnic breakdown of our LAC population as at the year-end 2018/19.



8.3 In order to address this we encourage foster carers to undertake bespoke training around understanding issues relating to ethnicity and diversity. These courses are both E-learning and live training events:

- Valuing & Promoting Diversity
- Understanding Caring for Asylum Seeking, Refugee and Unaccompanied Children
- Understanding and Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Unsure Children & Young People
- Preventing & Recognising Radicalisation

2018/19 will see the introduction of training around understanding and working with the travelling community.

9. The Supported Lodgings Team

9.1 The Supported Lodgings Service continues to work with the communications team to promote, inform and educate the public to raise awareness of the scheme. Fresh content in the form of social media, radio adverts, flyers and merchandise have been utilised in various formats. The recruitment van, “Vinny”, is shared with the Supported Lodgings service, providing the same access to rural locations and offering mobile promotion of the services around the county.

9.2 Most recently, a video of current Supported Lodgings providers and a Vietnamese young person has been released with the aim of providing ‘real life’ insight into the supported lodgings role and the positive impact on vulnerable young people. Applications to date range from ‘landlords’ wanting to help a young person, to experienced carers who are looking for approval as a jointly registered foster carer/supported lodgings providers (hybrids). All these marketing strategies are underpinned by the new branding of “support with trust” with the ever-present strapline of “your home their future”.

9.3 April 2018-March 2019, 40 young people have been newly accommodated in Supported Lodgings placements, a mixture of LAC and homeless young people. Currently 57 young people are accommodated through this project. Providers have been encouraged to extend their approval potential to take more parent and child and more Emergency Duty placements. The scheme has also utilised experienced carers in providing accommodation and support to a number of young people under the age of 16, with robust risk assessments in place. This has resulted in two supported lodgings carers seeking fostering status and becoming ‘hybrid’ carers. Focused support and training is being developed to help providers offer statutory placements to young people with more complex needs, thereby expanding local support and pathway options.

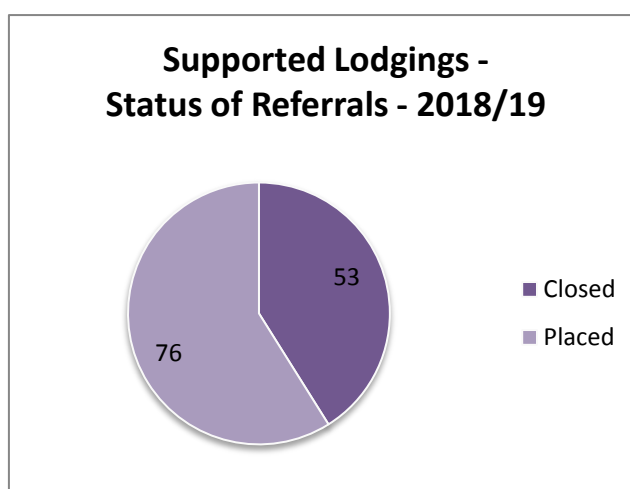
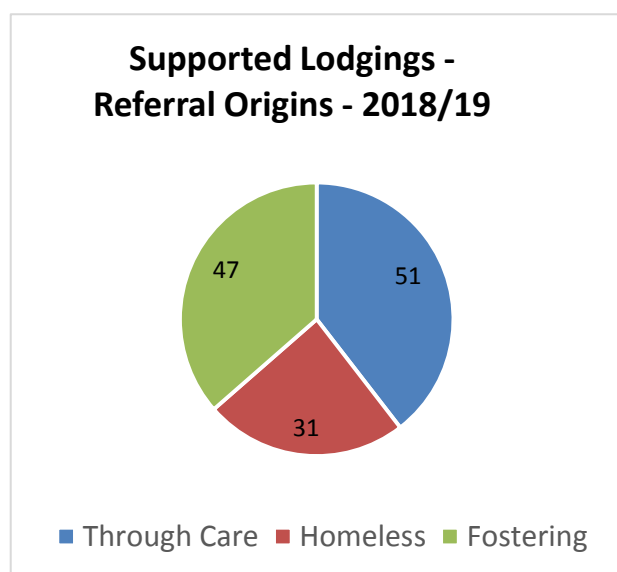
9.4 The Supported Lodgings service continues to demonstrate that when appropriately matched, young people can benefit by ‘stepping down’ from expensive agency placements to an appropriate supported lodgings provider. Two examples of this would be a young person who moved from a residential placement (at a cost of £890 a week) to a supported lodgings provider (at a cost of £202.00 a week). Another “step-down” from a young person’s agency residential placement costing £3,300 per week, to an appropriate supported lodgings provider, saved £2,987 per week. Currently 20 Care Leavers, 5 homeless young people, 21 fostered, 9 Staying Put and 2 UASC young people have been placed with Supported Lodgings providers.

9.5 As of 31 March 2019 there were 48 Supported Lodgings households providing a total of 73 placements across the county. In the year 2018/19 there has been 10 new approvals, providing 13 additional beds. Although this is an increase on the 2017/18 figures, recruiting in East Sussex remains challenging because of the competitive nature of this market. The service is in direct

competition with other organisations seeking host services such as student accommodation for language schools. The revised marketing strategy allows the service to attract applicants who may have previously considered taking overseas and local students, households where their own children have recently left home (empty nesters), single carers and foster carers wishing to transition to Supported Lodgings rather than retiring.

9.6 Of the 48 households, 12 of these hold 'hybrid' status offering both fostering and supported lodgings placements with a further household currently in assessment. 27 hold supported lodgings only status and a further 9 offer continuing support to young people with Looked After status under 'Staying Put' legislation.

9.7 Between 01 April 2018 and 31 March 2019, the Supported Lodgings team received 129 referrals requesting placements for young people. 51 of which were for care leavers, 31 were for homeless young people and 47 were older children requiring foster placements. Of the 129 referrals, 53 were closed, 76 young people were placed and 0 referrals remained open.



10. User participation

10.1 The Children in Care Council (CICC) continues to make a significant contribution to the support of LAC and to the advice it provides both locally and nationally to decision makers. Below are a number of examples of the CICC's activities over 2018/19.

- CICC have been involved in several projects with the Children's Commissioners office, including takeover day, recruitment panels in London and forming a working party for developing a new national digital hub, IMO, where LAC and care leavers can come together online.
- The royal visit was the highlight of this year and gave the opportunity for eight CICC members together with other youth voice groups from East Sussex to meet and speak directly to HRH Duke and Duchess of Sussex.
- CICC members shadowed two MPs Helen Tabiner and Helen Musgrove Deputy Directors for Youth and Social Action for the national takeover day.
- CICC members now invite young people aged 15+ to their meetings twice a year to discuss their issues, and separately also meet with younger looked after children.
- CICC have continued their participation in foster carer preparation groups and have developed their own recruitment panel for prospective foster carers.

- Two CICC members facilitated a morning lecture at Brighton University with social workers who are completing their master's degree in social work. They discussed their CICC role, and presented an interactive exercise about the separation and loss that young people can experience coming into care.
- CICC consulted with members of the senior management team, the Through Care Team, YES (Youth Employment Service), The Safeguarding Unit, School nurses and CGL (Change Grow Live Advocacy Service) about the services they provide to young people living away from their family.
- CICC published two newsletters that have been widely distributed to all ESCC LAC aged eight and above
- Work experience within Children's Services.
- Partnership working with the Through Care Team and the Housing Project resulting in care leavers now being exempt from council tax in all Sussex districts.
- The implementation of the "Rucksack" project and contents for young people coming into care for the first time.

11. Working in Partnership with East Sussex Foster Care Association (ESFCA)

11.1 The Operations Manager attends the monthly evening meetings of the ESFCA management group to report on the developments of the Fostering Service and on Children's Services more generally. During 2018/19 the service has worked closely with the now established chair and trustees of the ESFCA. The ESFCA have worked closely with the service and the LAC service to achieve a proposal for the implementation of consistent savings for looked after children. ESCC continues to offer ESFCA both office space and financial support.

12. The Placement Support Service (PSS)

12.1 The PSS is currently supporting 155 young people. 81 reviews of packages of support were held throughout the year. During 2018-2019 74 new pieces of ongoing work were commissioned. This increase in activity was possible due to PSS recruiting additional staff to extend the service to the Through Care Team and that has been received very positively and provided care leavers with much needed support.

12.2 In addition, the PSS also responded to 120 emergency or crisis requests from carers that resulted in 140 days of support being given. The LAC and Through Care and social work teams, continue to value the rapid response PSS offers to our young people.

12.3 The PSS continues to generate income from a number of sources including Arts Award, Supermarkets, and ESFCA. Additional income has enabled holiday activities to continue for children and young people aged 5 to 17. This has been beneficial to LAC by providing continuity of education activities and therapeutic support.

12.4 The partnership with Bede's School continues to allow our young people to access sports facilities including the swimming pool free of charge at weekends. The PSS continue to negotiate free tickets to Brighton and Hove Albion football matches and free admission to Reystede Animal Welfare Centre.

12.5 During the year:

- 40 group holiday activities were provided
- PSS worked with 127 young people
- 454 holiday places were offered to children and young people
- 10 to 15 young people on average attend each activity

12.6 Foster carers value placement support and holiday activities highly and there are a number of examples where placements have been sustained because of PSS intervention. The quotes below are a small sample of the testimonies provided by foster carers.

'Placement Support is what keeps this placement going, they are amazing'.

'There is a strong possibility this placement would have broken down without PSS'.

'Placement support is a great help and gives us a much needed break'.

13. Summary

13.1 During 2018/9 East Sussex Fostering Service received an outstanding Ofsted inspection as part of the wider Children's Service inspection. The wider report highlighted a number of areas of good practice in the Fostering Service including the support of carers, the matching of placements and the participation of young people who foster. Irrespective of these commendations, East Sussex Fostering Service, in common with its neighbouring local authorities (and nationally) remain challenged by the recruitment resources available to them. A net gain in foster carer resources this year is of course welcomed. However, with the increased number of LAC in the first half of this year, coupled with the complexity of the young people requiring placements, this has meant that the most appropriate placement match is not always available at the right time. We have called more than ever on the resilience of our existing carers to "hold" young people in bridging placements whilst appropriate placements are sought or become available.

13.2 It continues to be the case that external resources (independent fostering agencies) cannot be relied upon to shore up our fostering resource because even externally sometimes placements just aren't available. The success of East Sussex's recruitment activity means that the majority of foster carers living within East Sussex borders are in fact registered with ESCC. Therefore, our recruitment objectives going forward will be a combination of attracting households new to fostering, but significantly, also attracting experienced households wishing to transfer from independent agencies to East Sussex.

13.3 The services strengths remain good quality support and supervision, and close partnership working with our health colleagues, and the Virtual School. The uplift to fostering allowances allows more 'competitive remuneration' with IFA's and neighbouring local authorities. By using these USP's within our marketing strategy, The Fostering Service will hopefully continue to recruit effectively for the next 12 months.

13.4 Within the 12 month reporting period, the significance of our Supported Lodgings Service, in its ability to provide resources and support to a broad range of young people requiring accommodation has become even more apparent. It is the intention of the Fostering Service and the Supported Lodgings team to align their recruitment processes to ensure effective and timely responses to all applications and maximise flexible support to providers.

14. The Key Management Priorities for 2018/2019 include:

- Continued investment into the Supported Lodgings Team in order to optimise recruitment potential.
- Recruitment of foster carers and building upon the net gain in 2018/19 by continuing to lead the recruitment strategy with "foster with trust" branding.
- Retention of foster carers by continuing to provide the high standard of support and supervision of our foster carers on which ESCC's Fostering Service has built its reputation.
- To provide appropriate placements for all young people becoming LAC by expanding the placement potential of fostering households through training and supervision.
- To work with colleagues from LAC and locality services to ensure more accurate ethnicity descriptions of young people being referred for placement finding.

ⁱ These figures relate to children and young people living within foster homes of varied care status and they therefore may differ from other related reporting inclusive of the LAC population.

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Glossary

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AFG	Adoptive Families Group
AOs	Adoption Orders
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ASF	Adoption Support Fund
ASYE	Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (newly qualified social workers)
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CAFCASS	Children and Families Court Advisory Service
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
CGL	Change Grow Live Advocacy Service
CICC	Children in Care Council
CiN	Child in Need
CP	Child Protection
CPA	Child Protection Advisor
CSC	Children's Social Care
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
CWD	Children with Disabilities
CYP	Children and Young People
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service
DDP	Dyadic Developmental Psychology
DfE	Department for Education
EHSCMT	Early Help and Social Care Management Team
ESFCA	East Sussex Foster Care Association
ESHCT	East Sussex Health Care Trust
EXC	Excluding
Fte	Full Time Equivalent
GDPR	The General Data Protection Regulation
GPs	General Practitioners
ICPC	Initial Child Protection Conferences
IDACI	Indices of Deprivation Affecting Children Index
IFA	Independent Fostering Agencies
IICSA	Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse
ILAC	Inspection of Looked After Children
IMO	In My Opinion
IMR	Independent Management Review
IRO	Independent Reviewing Officer
ISEND	Inclusion Special Education Needs and Disability Service

LA	Local Authority
LAC	Looked After Children
LACAMHS	The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service for Looked After Children
LADO	The Local Authority Designated Officer
LCS	Liquidlogic – the Children’s Services electronic database
LMG	Local Managerial Grades
LSCB	Local Safeguarding Children Board
MACE	Multi-Agency Criminal Exploitation of Children
MASH	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub
NAIRO	National Association of IROs
NIROMP	The National IRO Managers Partnership
NSPCC	National Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Children
OM	Operational Manager
PEPs	Personal Educational Plan
PM	Practice Manager
PREVENT	Government strategy to prevent people being drawn into terrorism (not an acronym)
PSS	Placement Support Services
QA	Quality Assurance
RAA	Regional Adoption Agency
RCPC	Review Child Protection Conference
SCIS	Social Care Information System
SGO	Special Guardianship Order
SMT	Senior Management Team
SN	Statistical Neighbours
SWET	Social Work Education Team
THRIVE	Model of Therapeutic Support (not an acronym)
UASC	Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child
USP’s	Unique Selling Point
VAA	Voluntary Adoption Agencies
YES	Youth Employment Service

Report to: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date: **26 July 2019**

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

Title of report: **Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service 01 April 2018 – 31 March 2019**

Purpose of report: **To outline the performance of the Adoption and Permanence Service between 01 April 2018 and 31 March 2019**

RECOMMENDATION:

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

1. Background information

1.1 The Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service is attached as Appendix 1.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to comment on and 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

The Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service is attached as Appendix 1.

Background Documents

None

Appendix 1 - Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service

1. Supporting Information

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
1. Number of children adopted	45	38	29	27 (AOs)
2. Number of adoption matches (children)	32	38	30	39
3. Number of permanent fostering matches	10	14	5	4
4. Number of East Sussex adoptive matches (children)	26	30	30	33
5. Number of ASE adoptive matches (children)	0	0	0	2
6. Number of inter-agency matches (children):				
Permanence:	2	0	1	1
Adoption:	6	8	6	4
7. Number of prospective adopters approved	41	30	25	33 (of which 4 2nd time)
8. Number of permanent carers approved (households)	2	1	3	3
9. Number of children approved for adoption up to 31 st March 2017 (including 2 re approvals)	53	52	69	43
10. Number of children approved for permanence up to 31 st March 2019	14	32	24	22 (of which 10 change of Care Plan from adoption to perm)
11. Number of approved adopters waiting to be matched	22	20	12	14 (from the 33 approved this year)
12. Number of disruptions presented to Panel pre Order:				
Permanence:	0	0	0	0
Adoptions:	1	0	1	1

2. Recruitment Activity

2.1 Activity levels in general were higher during 2018/2019 than in the previous year. The table above shows that East Sussex County Council (ESCC) saw a greater number of adopters approved, although the numbers were still down on previous years. This reflected the national picture and the general crisis in the sufficiency of adopters. It also was reflective of the situation in our neighbouring authorities and particularly our partners in Adoption South East (ASE) i.e. Surrey, Brighton and Hove and West Sussex. In spite of the challenges East Sussex has continued to maintain a favourable position regarding recruitment compared to our statistical neighbours.

2.2 To ensure that ESCC were not losing potential adopters to other Local Authorities (LA) or Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA) the Service followed up on prospective adopters who had attended Information Events in the past 18 months, but who had not returned their registration of interest form. An analysis of the trends and reasons people did not progress forward demonstrated that potential applicants were not going to other agencies. Instead the picture related to individual situations, for example, moving jobs or moving home. This confirmed anecdotal information held previously which suggested that people considering adoption would approach agencies to find out about what is required in the process, while still exploring other options or completing significant life events such as changing jobs, moving home or getting married.

2.3 The Information Events remained busy and again numbers attending these were higher than in 2017-2018. However, there was a decrease in people registering their interest to adopt in quarter 4, this was not a trend seen by our colleagues in the other ASE authorities. The service is hopeful that this is a temporary situation and there has been a slow upturn in people registering their interest in quarter 1 of 2019. However, there is no room for complacency in a competitive market place and hence ESCC has changed the policy on adopters who use vapes to come into line with the other local authorities in ASE. During 2018/2019 there was positive feedback about the quality of the recruitment programme.

2.4 During 2018/2019 88 households attended information events and 37 households registered their interest to adopt. The conversion rate from information event to registration remained high and 33 adopters were approved by the year end, an increase of 8 compared to 2017/2018. Continuing to invest time in making enquirers welcome, helping them understand the process and supporting them through Stage 1 appeared to pay dividends in encouraging enquirers who were ready to proceed to choose to adopt with ESCC.

2.5 Similarly to last year, the Adoption Service continued to attract a significant number of applicants with more complex histories than the Service was traditionally used to. A number of assessments were not completed within the year and this resulted in the applications being paused, whilst others were counselled out of adoption completely. This is the third year that the number of adopters being approved was lower than what was required in terms of children needing adoptive families.

2.6 The Government's regionalisation agenda gained significant momentum during this period with an increased number of pilot regions going live. ESCC has worked for the past 3 years with the ASE partnership to form a regional adoption service. The work stream meetings continued to operate across the four LAs in an effort to develop common practice and shared events in all areas of adoption service delivery. It was recently agreed that ESCC will host the management and coordination of the new regional service, anticipating implementation and 'go live' in April 2020.

2.8 Whilst there was encouragement to share resources across the region, each LA continued to prioritise the meeting of local targets whilst the development work is ongoing.

2.9 The majority of East Sussex adopters are White British however couples of mixed heritage including Indian, Spanish, Dutch and German were also approved. Last year whilst the majority of adopters approved were heterosexual couples, 2 single adopters and 2 same sex female couples were also approved.

3. Family Finding and Matching

3.1 In common with the National picture, there appears to have been a decrease in the number of children with a plan for adoption. During 2017-2018 there were 69 children with the plan for adoption, whereas during 2018/2019 the figure was 43 and 2 re-approvals. The number of

ADM decisions and the number of Placement Order Applications is falling and this reflects a local and national trend.

The largest sibling group during this period was a group of three. However, there continued to be numbers of young children aged 0-2 needing placement as well as slightly older children and sibling groups of 2, many of whom presented significant challenges in relation to family finding.

3.2 There were 39 children matched during 2018/2019 which was a slight increase on the previous year. Whilst overall the number of children approved decreased during this period, the levels of complexity and uncertainties re health and development remained high. This, together with legal complications, at times caused significant delay to the matching process, which in turn caused extra pressure on foster placements and extra cost. The ethnic profile of children approved reflects the local population; 6 of the total number approved were from other ethnic groups including Guyanese, Sri Lankan, White/African Caribbean and Iranian.

3.3 The number of birth parents seeking leave to revoke Placement Orders continued to remain steady. The impact of this though was that adopters were often in limbo and in some cases withdrew from a potential match because of the uncertainty. In general once children are placed, adopters have become increasingly aware that parents are likely to appeal at the time of the adoption application. This, at times, resulted in a significant delay in the Adoption Orders being granted. Despite this, there were 27 Adoption Orders granted in 2018/2019.

3.4 ESCC developed a greater post placement support offer during this period in the form of; a therapist for adopters focusing on forming attachments early in placement and Video Interactive Guidance. There was also a greater focus on encouraging and providing in house training for family and close friends to offer direct support to the adoptive placement. One form of support which was highly successful was the Natter and Play group run by members of the Adoption Team. This group was for adopters who had pre-school age children. It had a high level of attendance and the feedback was very positive. The group supported adopters, which in turn helped them to feel less isolated and able to talk to people who shared their experiences. For the children, as they grow up they will know other children who have been adopted. Many families have also maintained contact outside of the group.

3.5 ESCC continued to place the majority of children within East Sussex, although this year was quite a challenge due to a mis-match between numbers of children and available adopters, coupled with some unsuitable geographic locations for some matches. Therefore the Service placed a small number of children out of county with VAAs, other LAs and with the region that will be covered by ASE. There were also 7 Fostering for Adopt placements, all made with East Sussex Adopter/Foster Carers. East Sussex continues to have a good track record for the timeliness of children entering care and being placed with their adoptive family and adopted

3.6 In terms of income generation there were 5 single children placed from other LAs with ESCC adopters which is slightly less than last year.

3.7 In conjunction with ASE colleagues, there were five profile events taken forward during the year. For the first time East Sussex hosted an Activity Day known as 'Meet and Play'. This event was designed for children from the ASE who were waiting or had been waiting for some time to attend a fun event with their foster carers and social workers, and for adopters to attend to meet and play with the children. East Sussex staff undertook the planning and preparation whilst the ASE partners assisted on the day. 23 children were featured, 10 of whom were from East Sussex. 4 children from East Sussex were matched with in house adopters. 2 were siblings aged 6 and 8 and 2 aged 3 and 5 and were part of a sibling group of 3.

4. Adoption Support

4.1 During 2018/2019 there was a national picture of an increasing number of children placed for adoption who were significantly traumatised by their early life experiences. Many adoptive

families were struggling to manage complex presentations including relationship difficulties, poor emotional regulation and challenging behaviours. In response to this the Post Adoption Support Service in ESCC co-ordinated a high number of intensive packages of support, this often required multidisciplinary/multiagency interventions particularly where safeguarding concerns were a factor.

4.2 For some families planned respite sometimes enabled children/young people to stay within their family, but resources are scarce for this complex client group. During this period there was an unprecedented number of adoptions which broke down – a total of 6. Sadly these children and young people were no longer able to live with their adoptive families. This included some quite young children aged 5-7 as well as some teenagers.

4.3 There were 56 new referrals for post adoption support assessments over the past year with the majority resulting in the provision of packages of support. The adoption CAMHS service, AdCAMHS, continued to offer a dedicated consultation and therapy service even in the context of limited clinical resources. Unfortunately, the service was without a clinical psychologist for nearly a year but this post was recruited to by year end. Other clinicians included the part time clinical lead psychotherapist, a part time art psychotherapist and a trainee psychotherapist, all supported by some dedicated administrative time.

4.4 AdCAMHS was commissioned to support 40 families but consistently provided a service to over 60 families. AdCAMHS and social care colleagues continued to offer Therapeutic Parenting Groups and a Teen Group which included an overnight woodland camp. Adoptive families very much valued AdCAMHS, as the clinical work has been proven to strengthen family relationships and increase placement stability. Feedback from adopters indicated that they appreciated the support and a key contact for 'the longer journey'.

4.5 The Virtual School continued to offer a service to adopted children and young people. This support was reconfigured to develop a wider service and expertise across the whole School rather than it only being available through one dedicated post. The role of the Virtual School was to ensure that children and young people had the best opportunities and outcomes. It worked with schools to develop inclusive practice. The Virtual School also provided an extensive source of information and advice to assist in parents advocating for their children in an educational setting. The Pupil Premium Plus, introduced in 2014, recognized that adopted children and young people often required extra support in school due to their early life experiences.

4.6 The THRIVE caseworker in the adoption team continued to work closely with colleagues in the Virtual School. THRIVE is an approach which draws upon insights from neuroscience, attachment theory and child development to provide a dynamic way of working with children and young people that supports optimal social and emotional development. It is proven to help them to re-engage with life and learning.

4.7 Since being launched nationally in 2015, the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) has enabled large numbers of adoptive families to receive ongoing therapeutic support. Children adopted from care, intercountry adoptions and children subject to Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) are all eligible. However, this Government funding is only guaranteed until March 2020 and it is very uncertain whether this will continue to be funded after that. The existence of the fund raised the expectations of adopters nationally and resulted in a high volume of requests locally, which were all screened by the service prior to submission. Within ESCC, local adopters reported that they were anxious about the uncertain future surrounding this and what impact this could have on meeting local needs.

4.8 The Adoptive Families Group (AFG) established some years ago, was rejuvenated towards the end of 2018/2019. It was originally founded by adopters in conjunction with ESCC as a support network, but also to raise awareness of adoption support issues. At that time it also took

on a lead role in lobbying the Government about support in schools for adopted children, which resulted in the extension of the Pupil Premium for adopted children. The rejuvenated AFG has begun to focus on the regionalisation agenda and the future of the ASF. A relaunch event is planned for September 2019.

4.9 With regionalisation firmly on the agenda, the ASE post adoption support work stream continued to meet during the past year. However, with the ASE 'go live' date scheduled April 2020, the main focus of the work going forward will be on identifying a core ASE adoption support offer. Adoption Support managers across the region will continue to work together to consider how resources can be shared to best support adoptive families in the south east. This is a complex area of work as the services are resourced quite differently.

4.10 ESCC provided a service to 115 adopted adults seeking to access their records/information about their adoption during 2018/2019. Relatives of adopted adults continued to be offered an intermediary service via the contract with CMB Counselling.

4.11 The Adoption Service continued to run two events annually for adoptive families which were well attended. Through the contract with PAC-Adopt UK, four support groups were offered to adopters at different locations across the county.

4.12 Referrals to the contact service continued to rise with every adoptive match during the year. The Letterbox Service continued to co-ordinate exchange of information between adopters and various birth family members. The Direct Contact Caseworker facilitated the complex face to face meetings between adoptive children and young people with birth family members. Due to increasing number of referrals into the direct contact service an additional part-time post was created and recruited to. The Contact Service supported 645 active letterbox arrangements during this period, and 192 children with an active direct contact arrangement with a birth relative.

5. Adoption & Permanence Panel

5.1 The number of Panels continued throughout the year at a similar frequency to 2017/2018 last year

5.2 The Bellbrook Centre continued to provide an appropriate and economical venue for the Panel meetings

5.3 The Panel enjoyed an excellent joint training session with the adoption team in November, which focused on good quality assessments and learning from the serious case reviews.

5.4 The contract with East Sussex Health Care Trust (ESHCT) continued to provide an excellent standard of medical advice to Panels as well as servicing the needs of LAC, adopted children and adult adopters. Where possible all adopters were offered a face to face meeting with a medical advisor prior to a match, where this was not possible a detailed telephone consultation took place prior to panel.

5.6 The Panel welcomed three new County Councillors who completed an induction course and commenced attendance at Panel.

6. Management Priorities 2019/20

- To continue to target recruitment for ESCC children and to manage the tension between the number of children and the challenge of adopter sufficiency.

- Since confirming ESCC role as host, to lead further expansion into a regional service together with our partners in Surrey, Brighton & Hove and West Sussex. To update and revise policies and procedures in accordance with new regulations and strategy guidance, in conjunction with ASE partner agencies.
- To maintain and extend adoption support developments, including the revised CAMHS contract, close partnerships with the Virtual School and continue to use the Adoption Support Fund to good effect.
- To maintain the new ESHCT contract and to ensure that the improved services continue.
- To ensure ESCC's role as host to ASE brings added value, builds on success and leads the way for high quality standards of practice aiming to deliver an excellent Regional Adoption Agency (RAA).

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SMT	Senior Management Team
SN	Statistical Neighbours
SWET	Social Work Education Team
THRIVE	Model of Therapeutic Support (not an acronym)
UASC	Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child
USP’s	Unique Selling Point
VAA	Voluntary Adoption Agencies
YES	Youth Employment Service

Report to: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date: 26 July 2019

By: Director of Children's Services

Title of Report: Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report

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

RECOMMENDATION:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to comment on and note 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 Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report April 2018 – March 2019 is attached as Appendix 1.

3. Recommendations

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

STUART GALLIMORE

Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Fiona Lewis – Operations Manager, Safeguarding Unit

Tel. No. 01323 464106

Email: Fiona.lewis@Eastsussex.gov.uk

Local Members

All

Appendices

The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report April 2019 – March 2019 is attached as Appendix 1

Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report April 2018 – March 2019

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 the Corporate Parenting Panel.

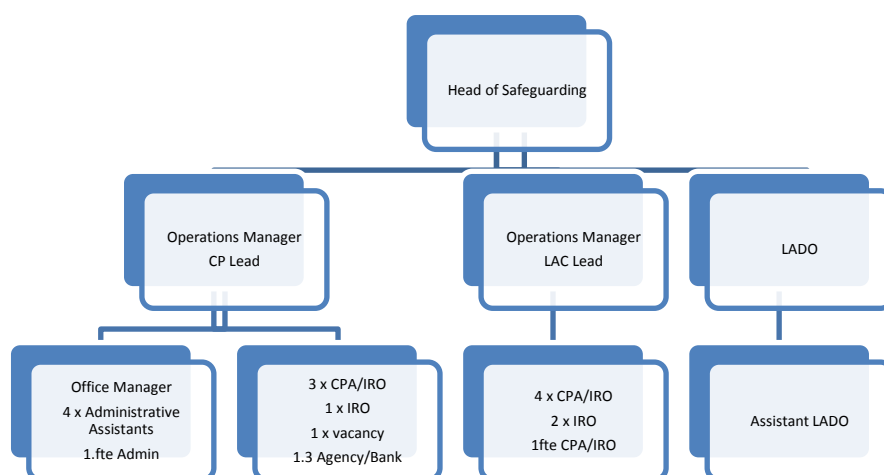
- 1.1 The Independent Reviewing Officers' service is set within the framework of the updated IRO Handbook, linked to revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance which were introduced in April 2011. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of care planning for children who are looked after and for challenging drift and delay. The responsibility of the IRO has expanded from the management of the review process to include regular monitoring and follow-up between reviews.
- 1.2 The appointment of an IRO for each Looked After Child is a legal requirement under S118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. IROs quality assure the care planning process for all Looked After Children (LAC) and ensure that their wishes and feelings are understood.
- 1.3 **The statutory duties of the IRO are to:**
- Monitor the Local Authority's performance of its functions in relation to the child's case.
 - Participate in any review of the child's case.
 - Ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child are given due consideration by the appropriate authority.
 - Perform any other function as prescribed in the regulations.
- 1.4 In addition IROs have the power to
- Adjourn reviews (Regulation 36(2)) if they are satisfied that the Local Authority has not complied adequately with all the requirements relating to the review.
 - Suspend decisions pending a LAC Review that would involve any unplanned change to the child's accommodation that would impact on their education (especially at key stage 4), changes of placement where the child has been settled and established for some time or changes to their legal status.
 - Escalate concerns through the Local Authority's formal dispute resolution process, which should have a timescale of no more than 20 days.
 - Refer cases to the Children and Families Court Advisory Service (CAFCASS) under Regulation 45.
- 1.5 The LAC Reviewing Service contributes to East Sussex's Core Offer for Children's Social Care: ***Provide care and support for children and young people where there is evidence that they have suffered significant harm or are at immediate***

risk of significant harm and provide an alternative home for children who are unable to live with their parents or in their extended family.

- 1.6 784 children have been accommodated by ESCC throughout or for some part of 2018/19 with 610 LAC at year end¹. Each of these were required to have a review within the first 28 days of becoming accommodated; a second review within three months and thereafter a review no less than every six months. Supplementary reviews should take place if there have been, or if there are proposed significant changes to the placement, education, legal status etc.

2. Professional Profile of the Child Protection Advisor and Independent Reviewing Officer Service in East Sussex²

- 2.1 The IRO/CPA Service sits within the Performance and Planning Directorate of Children's Services. The Head of Children's Safeguarding is Douglas Sinclair; there are two Operations Managers; Sue McGlynn and Fiona Lewis who have the leads for Child Protection Advisors (CPA) / Safeguarding and for IROs / LAC respectively. The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), who deals with the allegations management of people who work or volunteer with children, also sits within the Safeguarding Unit; management cover for the LADO when on leave or not available this role is provided by the two Operations Managers.



- 2.2 The IROs chair the Looked After Children statutory review meetings and the CPAs chair the child protection conferences. When the unit was created the CPA and IRO were separate specialisms; today the majority of staff exercise a dual role and; this is common practice across much of England and Wales. There is a long standing debate regarding the benefits and disadvantages of combining the two functions;; specifically there is a concern that it dilutes the independence of the IRO. The two roles are separated by different legislation and regulatory protocols;; they each require a depth and breadth of expertise. Whilst this debate is kept under review;; operating the combined role allows the Unit greater elasticity and ensures that staff retain a sense of the child's holistic experience. The separate management streams

¹ Data in this report is accurate at the time of writing. Figures are subject to change due to variations in the way that data is captured and some delays within SCIS.

² Throughout this document the term IRO is used as a protected title; CPA/IRO is used to refer to staff within the Safeguarding Unit where the dual role / staffing complement is more relevant.

ensure a focus on legislative / practice developments and quality assurance of each function.

- 2.3 The Unit has a relatively diverse staff group who bring a wealth of personal and professional skills and experiences to their role. The IRO/CPAs are all registered social workers with extensive experience. They have the confidence and knowledge to bring a critical perspective to the care plans for the most vulnerable children in our county.
- 2.4 At the end of March 2019 the Safeguarding Unit comprised 12.3 fte IROs /CPAs. This was an increase of 2.7 on the previous year which had been agreed in response to increasing demand / high caseloads throughout 2018/2019.
- 2.5 In response to the issues raised in the 2017/2018 Annual Report regarding capacity within Business Support additional funding was agreed to recruit a one year fixed term Administrative Support Officer. This additional post will enable monitoring and tracking to ensure compliance / best practice.
- 2.6 IRO/CPAs have continued to undertake a number of different activities, whilst this has been constrained due to high caseloads it is an area of development.
- 1 IRO has a specialist lead for children with disabilities
 - 1 IRO has a specialist lead to support the Travelling Community
 - IRO/CPAs have lead on specific training for the LSCB, Universities and newly qualified social workers.
 - 1 IRO/CPA chairs PREVENT meetings
 - 2 IROs lead on asylum seeking children and young people
 - 2 IRO/CPAs sit on the MACE Panel
 - 1 IRO is a member of the Resilience Leads Group
 - Team Links have been revisited / reallocated
- 2.7 The Safeguarding Operations Manager leading on Child protection continues to Chair the Local Safeguarding Children Liaison Groups (LSCB Subgroup) in the East and West of the County. The Safeguarding Operations Manager leading on LAC now Chairs a number of Secure Accommodation Reviews. The Operations Managers have completed three Internal Management Reviews for Serious Case Review (child) and one IMR for a Safeguarding Adults Review.

Fostering Better Outcomes

Government response to the Education Select Committee into fostering & Foster Care in England

“We will work with organisations representing Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and LAs to consider how the role of IROs can be put to best effect in the current system and under existing legislation. There is potential for IROs to bring about significant practice improvements, alongside their role in ensuring that young people experience the best care from their fostering service. Where IROs are valued and listened to, they provide a legitimate and respected challenge function for individual children’s care plans and the wider service delivery.”

3. Risk

- 3.1 The Safeguarding Unit is in a significantly stronger position going into 2019 than at the time of writing the previous Annual Report. Key concerns last year were identified as being capacity, legal challenges and uncertainty regarding the future of the IRO role. Capacity across the year has been tight but agreement to recruit two further IROs alongside falling CP numbers will bring caseloads closer to statutory guidance. There have been further cases involving legal scrutiny of IRO performance but this has not accelerated as feared. Finally, the Government did not accept and have not acted on Sir Martin Narey's Fostering Stocktake recommendations regarding the role of the IRO.
- 3.2 Moving into 2019/20 risks are focussed on the increasingly complex cohort of LAC in a landscape where austerity has impacted on many of the previously available statutory and community resources.
- 3.3 The National shortage of foster placements and the reduced offer from agencies can impact on children's Care Plans. IROs have a duty to hold the Local Authority to account for its exercise of its corporate parenting responsibilities and to raise formal disputes in the event of concern. This can be a fine balancing act with IROs needing to evidence effective challenge and ensure compliance with statutory frameworks whilst also acting proportionately and recognising the reality of local budget challenges.
- 3.4 The legislative environment within which the majority of Children's Social Care work is undertaken is also facing significant change. Uncertainty regarding the European Withdrawal Bill has implications for jurisdiction and procedure. High levels of Care Proceedings and Private Family Proceedings have placed increasing pressure on the Courts, with Sir Andrew McFarlane, President of the Family Division committed to bringing about '*radical reform to working practices and processes*'³. A series of Practice Guidance is expected in September with change being implemented in both Private and Public cases by the late Autumn. Whilst these developments are expected to be beneficial to all those involved in the Family Courts, the changes will involve a period of learning.

OFSTED Inspection ESCC July 2018

Children are at the centre of care plans and they routinely take an active role in their reviews. Challenge from Independent Reviewing Officers is evident when there is a query about the nature or pace of care plans for children. However, senior managers recognise that this needs to be more consistent.

³ RESOLUTION CONFERENCE 2019 KEY NOTE ADDRESS Sir Andrew McFarlane President of the Family Division LIVING IN INTERESTING TIMES

4. Practicing Effectively

Caseloads

- 4.1 The majority of LMG2's in the Safeguarding Unit hold a dual role; reviewing both Child Protection and Looked After Child plans. CPA caseloads are not legislated; however the government has set statutory guidance for IROs: *a caseload of 50 to 70 looked after children for a full time equivalent IRO, would represent good practice. (The IRO Handbook DfE)*. At the end of March 2019 CPA/IRO combined caseloads averaged 101; recent local comparisons indicate that similar local authorities have an average caseload of 77.
- 4.2 The Unit also manages caseloads through expectations of the number of meetings that a Chair can review effectively across the week. Over the year the Unit chaired 1211 conferences (2366 individual Child's Plans) and 1629 LAC Reviews (this does not include data where reviews are held in multiple parts or separated for safety reasons). Taking account of a staff complement of 11.3 until February 2019 this equates to 251 meetings per chair.
- 4.3 It is recognised that whilst IROs have additional responsibilities for LAC; Child Protection caseloads can be more dynamic, meetings can involve multiple children and may involve a higher level of risk. Covering both roles necessitates an advanced depth and breadth of professional knowledge.
- 4.4 In East Sussex IROs have long held caseloads in excess of National Guidelines. Whilst measures have been put in place to ensure a safe and effective service, the capacity issues in the Unit have been recognised and agreement given to recruit two further IRO/CPAs.

Impact

- 4.5 All children who become Looked After by ESCC are allocated an IRO within statutory timescales and the majority of these maintain a stable relationship with that same IRO throughout their time in our care. The Unit has a relatively established staff complement which further ensures these long-term relationships. IROs demonstrate a strong commitment to children, resisting reallocation and working creatively to manage challenges caused by caseloads or location.
- 4.6 Whilst IROs have less frequent contact with children than their social workers or carers, they often have a longer term sense of the child's journey as they move between placements and teams. IROs also maintain responsibility for siblings wherever possible; they have contact with birth family and will likely have been into the homes of the child's various carers over time. The value of this is evident in reviews when children draw on IROs' memories to make sense of their childhood and attachment figures

**Thank you for all
your kindness and
understanding; for
being the one who
has been there
from the
beginning.** C aged 18

- 4.7 Children also use their IRO as an additional point of contact with the Local Authority; to challenge decisions about their care or to comment on the service they are receiving. Whilst the IRO should not divert from the social work relationship, it can be helpful for children, their families and carers to have the reassurance of an independent second opinion.

Escalation / Issues Resolution

- 4.8 There has been a drive across CP and LAC to improve compliance with procedures and ensure that statutory documentation is brought to all reviews. CPAs and IROs have emailed Social Workers and Practice Managers when reports have not been available or not shared in advance as well as logging this as an Issues Resolution on the child's electronic file. A report has been set up to track themes and share concerns with managers where there is a continued pattern of non-compliance. These first stage issues would not usually have been logged at this level and as such the numbers cannot be compared directly with Issues Resolution data from previous years.

- 4.9 A smaller number of Issues Resolutions have been raised in respect of children's Care Plans. Whilst these are generally resolved at Stage 2 others have been escalated and resolved at Head of Service / Assistant Director level. The current Dispute / Issues Resolution process does not track disputes within the statutory timeframe, nor does it adequately reflect the complex discussions and creative Care Planning that takes place between IROs and the LAC/Locality Managers. This remains an area for development with a need for improved digital solutions to ensure the integrity of the data.

The resolution of disputes is a time consuming activity and can create tensions between the IRO and the local authority. The managers of IRO services and senior managers in the local authority responsible for corporate parenting, will need to ensure that IROs have sufficient time and support in order to carry out this function of their work effectively. The IRO should ensure that all actions s/he takes in an attempt to resolve a dispute are recorded on the child's case record. IRO Handbook DfE

Opportunities

- 4.10 It is clear that children and young people benefit from a meaningful relationship with a consistent IRO; this connected practice throughout the child's journey requires time and energy. The majority of our regional and statistical neighbours comply with expectations for midway meetings between IROs and Social Workers as well as contact with the child between reviews. Reduced caseloads in 2019/20 will enable IROs to carry out these wider responsibilities, to work with teams to avoid drift and to achieve better outcomes for the children and young people in our care.
- 4.11 Additional capacity in the Administrative Support team has allowed the redevelopment of a LAC tracking system. The build and data entry phase of this

process has now been completed and we will be monitoring how this contributes to timely reviews / compliance over the coming months.

- 4.12 The LAC Review Administrative Support role will now provide checks and balances to drive compliance with the Review process and support effective meetings.

5. The Review Process

Participation

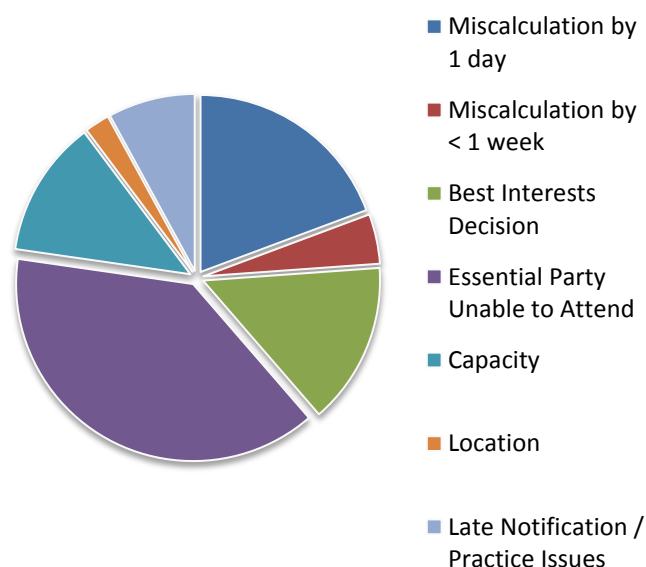
- 5.1 86% of children aged 4+ attended or actively contributed to their LAC review.
- 5.2 Children are encouraged to Chair their own Reviews and there is an enhanced focus on ensuring that they are consulted about who attends their meeting, where it takes place and what is discussed. The revised LAC Review documentation will place the child's participation at the centre of the process and ensure that all decisions are recorded in an accessible, child focussed manner.



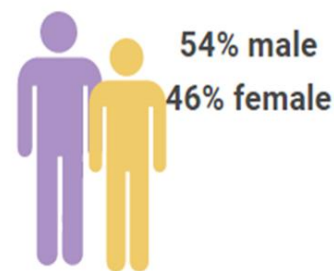
Timeliness

- 5.3 94.6% of all LAC Reviews were held early or on time in 2018/19. 88 reviews (5.4%) were late. 21 cases were a scheduling miscalculation of which 17 were miscalculated by just 1 day; 13 reviews were delayed in the best interests of the child, 34 were delayed due to an essential party being unable to attend and 2 were late due to travel requirements. 11 reviews were delayed due to capacity or reallocation within the Unit with 7 reviews late due to practice issues. Meetings are generally scheduled well in advance which contributes to a high level of compliance; the dynamic nature of placements and other calls on social work time can mean that meetings have to be moved at short notice and it is not always possible to reschedule these within timescales.

Late Reviews

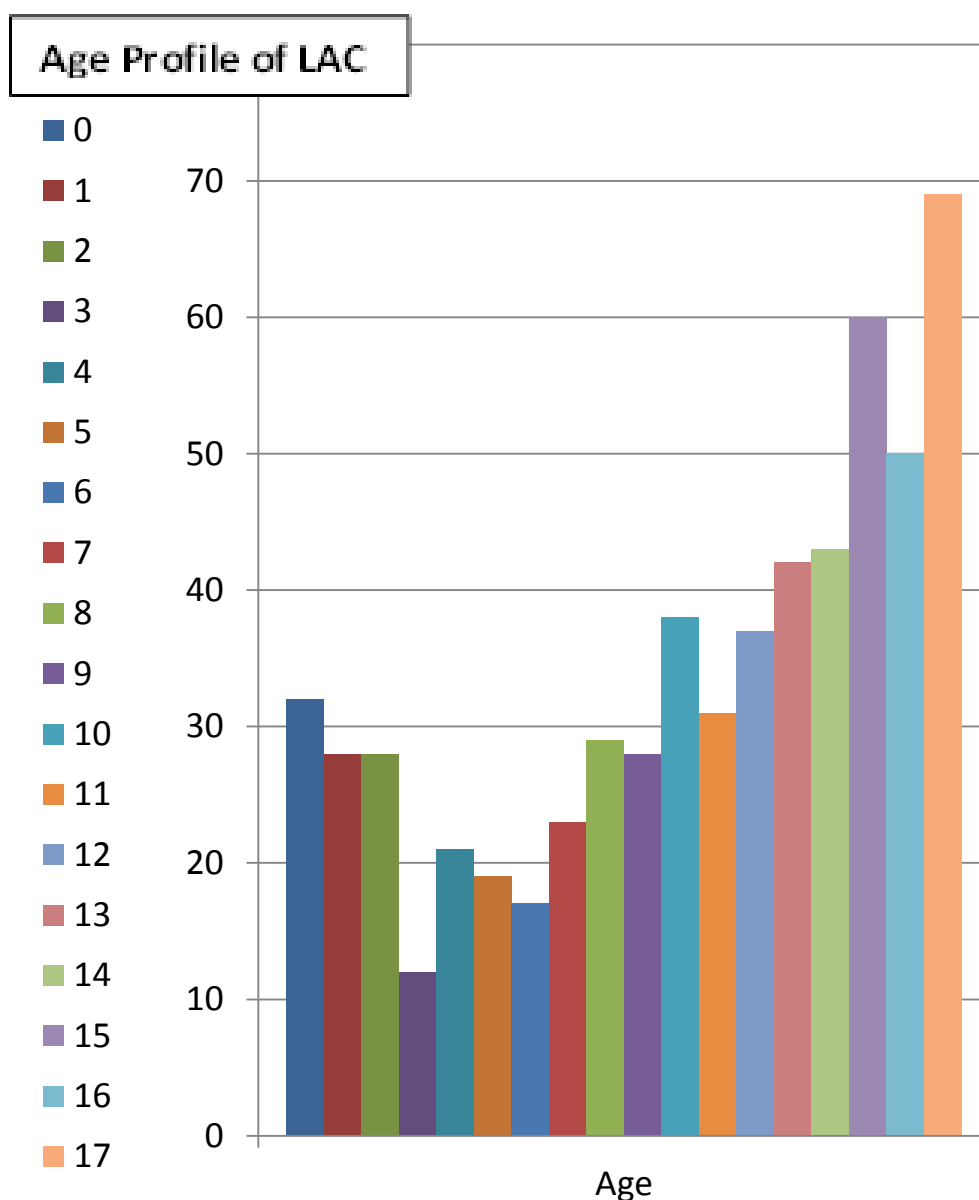


6. Knowing our Looked After Children - Demographics

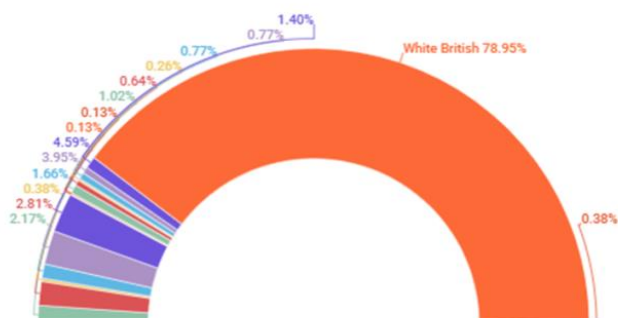


6.1 At the end of March 2019 ESCC was looking after 610 children and young people (57 per 10000) including 27 UASC. This was a net increase of only 4 children and sits below IDACI; however the end of year figure masks a higher number of LAC across the twelve month period with numbers climbing to 627 in November 2018 compared to 582 in November 2017.

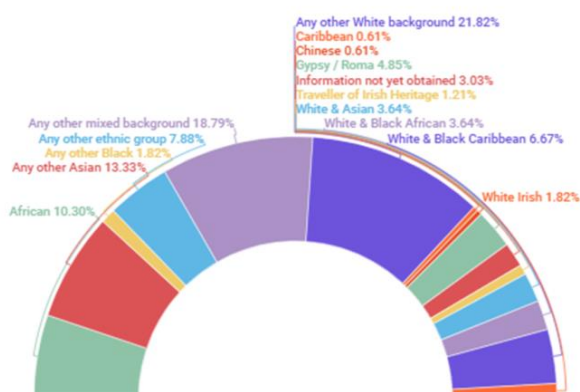
6.2 ESCC continues to accommodate more boys than girls, this is in line with National trends. The majority of children in our care are aged 11 or older.



- 6.3 Social Workers have demonstrated an enhanced commitment to ensuring that children's identity and any additional needs / characteristics are clearly recorded and understood. There has been a particular improvement in detailed recording of children's ethnicity and associated considerations such as language, dialect, diet and faith.



- 6.4 21% of the LAC population are BME; the majority of BME Looked After Children are drawn from other White backgrounds or are mixed heritage.



- 6.5 3% of the LAC population are children with a disability; whilst a relatively small cohort they require a high level of expert knowledge and skilled intervention to ensure that their Care Plans are effective and their voices heard.

3% of children had a disability

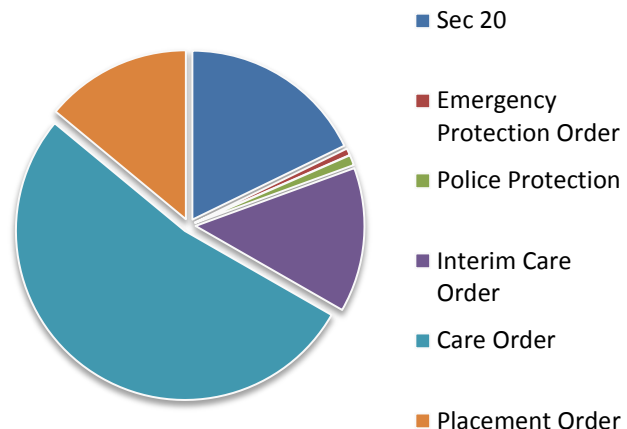


- 6.6 43% of children had an Initial Health Assessment within 20 days of being accommodated, 61% had their Health Assessment completed within 25 days. This was a deterioration on the previous year and below target. The LAC/Locality teams have a clear Action Plan in place to monitor and address delay; however the LAC Reviewing Service should also be contributing to this key area. Historically the Safeguarding Unit would prompt social workers to arrange the IHA when speaking to them in connection with the ILAC review. This practice will be resumed by the newly appointed IRO Administrative Support Officer.

7. Legal Status & Care Applications

Legal Status of LAC as at 31/03/2019

7.1 ESCC Issued 93 sets of Care Proceedings during 2018/19, a slight increase on 2017/18 where 91 sets of proceedings had been Issued but with rates per 10 000 significantly lower than the National or South East average. There has been a slight increase in the average length of Care Proceedings: still at 30-31 weeks but with only 20% completed within 26 weeks compared to 48% in 2017/18. This is broadly in line with National trends where Courts are recognising the importance of framing timescales to ensure proper assessment.



7.2 IROs continue to contribute views to Final Care Plans as well as being consulted throughout the proceedings and liaising with CAFCASS. A Professional Development session in January considered the statutory duties of the IRO in relation to Care Proceedings and ensured a re-focussing on the importance of viewing all relevant assessments / evidence.

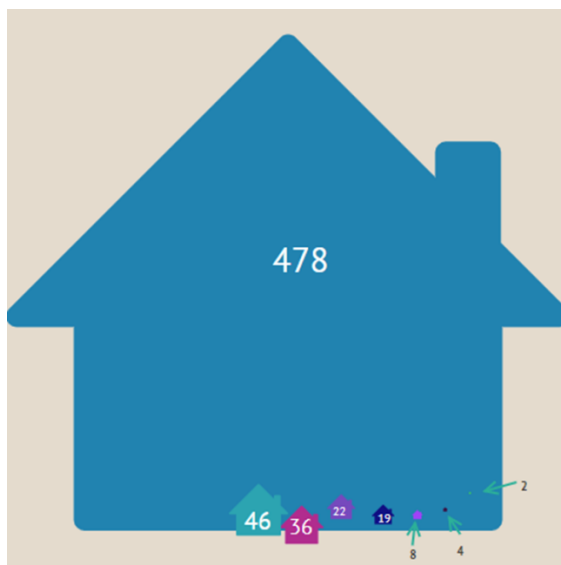
7.3 The majority of children in our care are subject to a Care Order. Children who are accommodated under Sec 20 (accommodated with consent of the parent and not under a legal order) are the most frequent subject of debate / challenge between the IROs and LAC/Locality teams. Where children are also subject to a Placement Order, this should be revoked once it becomes clear that adoption is no longer the Care Plan. For other children, their needs, birth family circumstances or the risks that previously existed will change over time; in those cases where it is safe and appropriate for children to return home, this should be an active consideration.

7.4 A key target for 2019/20 will be for IROs to actively discuss each child's legal status with the social work team in advance of the review and to ensure that where this status is no longer the most appropriate there is a plan in place to address that.

8. Where Do Our Children Live Whilst We Are Caring For Them?

- 8.1 The vast majority of LAC in ESCC live with foster carers (78%). Placements are generally stable although a few children experience multiple moves due to a combination of their presenting needs and the available placements. A piece of work

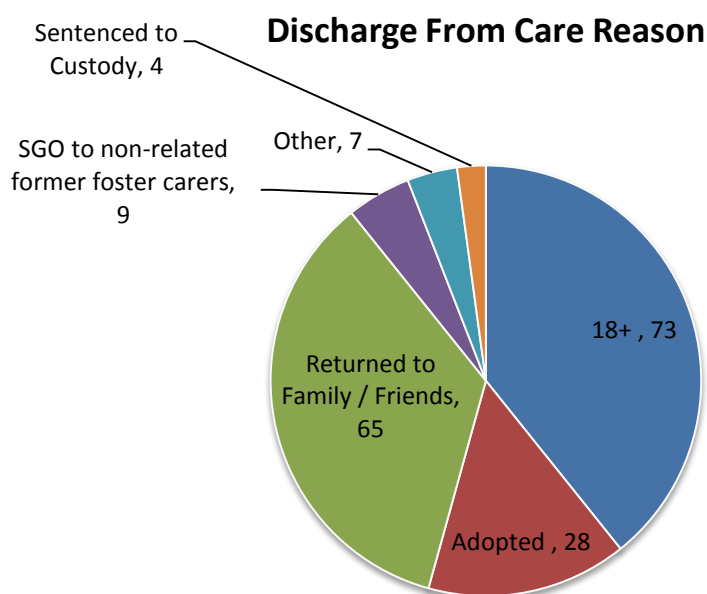
is being undertaken by the Operations Managers for the LAC Reviewing Service, the LAC and Fostering Services to better understand what works for these children and how to reduce disruptions in the future.



Foster Placement	478
Homes and Hostels	46
Residential Accommodation	36
Placed with Parents	22
Placed for Adoption	19
Temporary Move (respite)	8
Residential School	4
NHS / Health	2

Where Do Children Go When They Leave Our Care?

- 8.2 IROs have a responsibility to ensure that children who leave the care of ESCC have plans in place to ensure that their needs will be met moving forwards. Children leave care for a variety of reasons, sometimes moving into independence or returning to birth family, others cease to be LAC due to being adopted or becoming subject to another legal order within a permanent placement.



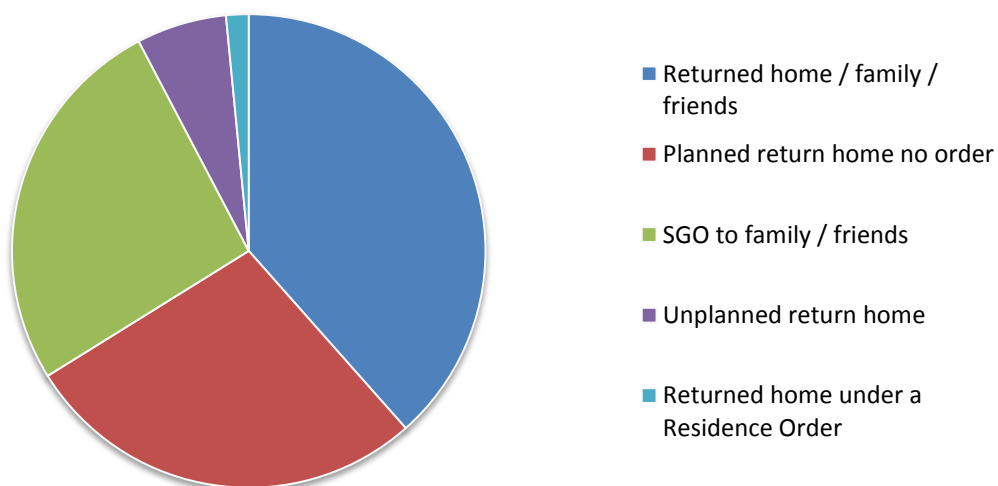
8.3 82% of young people who ceased to be LAC during 2018/19 due to turning 18, have formal arrangements in place to support them in their move to becoming adults.

8.4 More than a quarter of young people 'Stayed Put' with their existing Foster Carers; this is a highly positive reflection on the work of the ThroughCare and Fostering Services.

18+



Returned to live with Family / Friends



8.5 The majority of children who left the care of ESCC to return to live with their parents, relatives or friends did so in a planned and supported manner.

9. Looking Back - Progress on Priorities set for 2017-2018

Development of a standalone form for IRO contribution to Care Proceedings

- 9.1 A National response to this action is expected; ESCC will take a view on whether to adopt a template or to continue with the current process. Draft forms along with statutory guidance were considered at a Unit Development Session in January which enabled discussion of IRO duties and accountability within Care Proceedings.

Embed and develop the CPD programme

- 9.2 IROs receive regular supervision on a four weekly basis; there are monthly Unit Meetings which consider Council Business as well as the performance of the Safeguarding Unit against the PIP and key themes / professional issues. A number of Brief Bite sessions have been recorded following visits by other professionals to the monthly Unit Meeting. Planned training regarding IRO challenge is being commissioned by the SWET and is expected to run in the late Autumn.
- 9.3 The majority of IROs attended the Community Care Live Conference in September where they benefited from seminars covering Section 20 Accommodation, Integrated social care, Disabled children and the law, Use of Boarding Schools to improve the lives of vulnerable children, Modern Slavery and County Lines. This was a positive opportunity for team building and Continuing Professional Development with group discussions continuing throughout the day.
- 9.4 IROs are able to benefit from the Connected Practice Leadership Programme as well as other courses from the Training Offer. Two IROs completed the David Shemmings Leadership in Public Services Programme. IROs have attended Equality/Diversity training, Digital Practice, The Family Court Circle, The Family Justice Board training and Schools Safeguarding Conferences amongst others.
- 9.5 The National IRO Managers Partnership (NIROMP) are developing a training framework which we will reflect on and engage with as appropriate.

Enhance the profile of IROs through lead areas and facilitating training

- 9.6 This year has brought a renewed focus on IROs developing Lead Areas (set out above) and Professional Expertise as well as recognising the importance of Team Links and ensuring that these are prioritised. IROs already contribute to staff development through training at the Universities, the ASYE programme and LSCB. The Unit is offering each CSC ASYE a day's shadowing of an IRO/CPA to embed their understanding of the role and functions of statutory reviews.
- 9.7 The Principle Social Worker is developing Departmental training around LAC which the Unit will partner on in relation to new LAC documentation, expectations and culture.

Ensure robust, consistent scrutiny of care plans with use of the issues resolution process where necessary

9.8 IROs continue to scrutinise Care Plans and to offer informal, respectful challenge in the first instance. The Issues Resolutions process has been used more robustly over the year to drive compliance with Review documentation as well as a smaller number of challenges to practice. This has had a meaningful impact on our understanding of our LAC population and improving the quality of information available for the Review. Moving forward, the Issues Resolutions process will be relaunched to ensure consistent practice across IROs, clearer scrutiny of Care Plans and better tracking of these discussions.

The whole point and purpose of the system and machinery of Independent Reviewing Officers is precisely to keep the local authority (who are no doubt extraordinarily busy and overworked) on their toes and to be asking awkward questions.

[2014] EWHC 1341 (Fam)

Roll out of a more child friendly LAC Review process/document in line with statutory duties and the requests of the CICC.

9.9 There has been substantial consultation and development of the LAC Review Pathway which is now at piloting / sign off stage. There is agreement regarding a move to Review Outcomes being written in the form of a letter to the child, with QA data held on the same form but not exported for circulation. Consultation documents will now be incorporated into the Pre-Meeting Report so will be visible on the child's file and have enhanced significance within the Review process. Unnecessary duplication has been stripped out of the pathway wherever possible in an attempt to refocus social work time away from administrative functions and towards building relationships with children. Care Plans will concentrate on what is important for *this* child, what is happening in their lives now and what needs to be in place to enable them to move confidently into their future. The IRO letters are intended to provide children with a tangible record of their childhood and a real explanation of what decisions were made and why. Pilot letters have been very encouraging and have brought an added realisation of how much more accessible this communication will be for some of our families.

Driving up of standards within the unit to ensure that review decisions are circulated within timescales.

9.10 Completion of LAC Review documentation has improved following a change of practice and a more robust focus on raising Issues Resolution for cases where the Care Plan and Pre-Meeting Report were not available. High caseloads and an agreement to prioritise Child Protection Reviews has meant that some IROs continue to operate with a backlog; this is a focus of the Safeguarding Unit PIP and should be addressed in line with the streamlined LCS pathway set out above.

Increased expectation that IROs will visit or at least communicate with all LAC aged 5 and over between reviews.

- 9.11 Capacity issues across the year have impacted on this target; IROs prioritise contact with the most vulnerable children and ensure that they try to see each child prior to their review. Reduced caseloads in 2019/20 should affect progress in this area.

IROs to routinely record the quality of Health Assessments and PEPs.

- 9.12 This is a standard monitoring question within the IRO Outcome Document; issues with the SCIS have been addressed to improve consistency. Questions have been amended within the revised Review Documentation to ensure a focus on the application and relevance of information in the Health Assessment and PEP.

Dental Health amongst LAC in ESCC has been identified as being a particular cause for concern. This will be a focus for improvement across the LAC Service in 2018/2019. IROs will contribute to this target through pre and post review monitoring / discussions with carers, social workers and young people.

- 9.13 Using time within the LAC review to ask questions about dental and other health appointments was a key complaint of children and young people in our care. The new LAC documentation will seek to manage this data away from the meeting with the child whilst still ensuring robust monitoring. It is hoped that the skills and relationships that Supervising Social Workers have can be used more effectively to enhance child health records.

10. Looking Forwards - Improvement activities for 2019/2020

Participation:

- 10.1 Whilst the numbers of children participating in their review are high there is scope to improve the influence this has and the meaning of the review for the child. IROs will drive this through enhanced midway contact with children and young people.
- 10.2 It is clear that children, their families, carers and professional network do not always understand the process or mandate of the LAC Review. Development of Information packs and an enhanced media profile will enhance understanding and engagement.
- 10.3 Service User feedback will be investigated in 2019/20 with consideration of digital solutions to engagement.

Children with Disabilities – status and Care Plans:

- 10.4 The Operations Managers for CWD and the LAC Reviewing Service are undertaking a number of pieces of work to ensure that plans for children with disabilities take proper account of their circumstances and that they are compliant with statutory guidance. This will include an audit of children subject to Short Breaks.

Improving the quality and depth of Care Plans:

- 10.5 The majority of Care Plans are detailed and tailored to the individual child; however there is scope to improve analysis of how placements are meeting children's needs

and to reflect the rich texture of children's lives. Joint training across social work teams and the IROs will refocus plans to ensure that they are meaningful, dynamic documents. Formal monitoring of midway meetings between the IRO and social worker will drive progress.

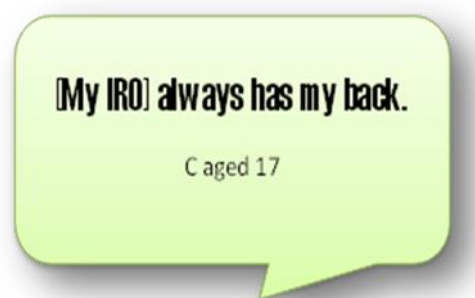
- 10.6 The revised LAC documentation should also enable better use of communication tools and translation services.

Improved Data Monitoring:

- 10.7 The Unit has recognised that much of the data reporting in previous years has been a duplication of the LAC Service Report and did not represent information management specific to the IRO role / Quality Assurance of ESCC as a Corporate Parent. The Safeguarding Unit Dashboard has been developed to provide a single Dashboard across both CP and LAC alongside revised LAC/IRO fields and an improved offer from Business Support.
- 10.8 A new Report has been requested and will be put to EHCSCMT for agreement / prioritisation. This is essential to ensure that the QA role provided by IROs at every LAC Review is purposeful.
- 10.9 Work to develop LAC Review documentation is addressed elsewhere in this report; planned changes to the IRO Outcome document will significantly reduce the time spent by IROs on unnecessary / duplicate processes whilst improving the focus of the document.

Improved compliance with documentation / data to ensure effective meetings

- 10.10 The LAC Review Service Administrative Support Officer will proactively track and prompt social workers to ensure that the monitoring undertaken by the IRO is focussed on the quality of the Care Plan rather than paperwork.



Report Authors:

Fiona Lewis – Operations Manager, Safeguarding Unit

Susan McGlynn

NAIRO IRO Effectiveness Improvement Plan November 2018

NAIRO (National Association of IROs) have produced an improvement plan following the Fostering Stocktake and Government response. Whilst these recommendations will drive a National agenda it is prudent to identify where ESCC is positioned on these priorities. The table below sets out NAIROs key recommendations and the Safeguarding Unit Response.

NAIRO Recommendation	ESCC LAC Reviewing Service ice / Safeguarding Unit Response
Reviewing the IRO Handbook (the main statutory guidance for IROs) to strengthen the independence of IROs, their status and influence within local authorities and their capacity to challenge.	The IRO Handbook is in need of a refresh to take account of current legislation and practice issues. Moves to strengthen IRO independence could include recommendations to take the role out of the LA which would undoubtedly result in less partnership work and more formal challenge. IROs currently seek to resolve issues informally wherever possible and have the advantage of existing relationships and access to the child's file. The LA should be alert to this possibility and to identify ways to enhance IRO independence / evidence of challenge whilst not losing the current strengths of an in-house service. IROs must feel empowered to raise challenges and the LA must evidence a meaningful response.
Facilitating closer relationships between IRO services and elected members.	The Lead Member with responsibility for Children and Families has evidenced a strong interest in the work of the Safeguarding Unit and support for voices of Children in Care. Engagement with the Lead Member and other elected members is facilitated through the Corporate Parenting Panel.
Requiring local management arrangements to support and facilitate effective challenge.	This has been a topic of discussion and development over the past year. IROs have ensured enhanced visibility of their informal discussions and formal Issues Resolution on the electronic record. ESCC is aware of the need to evidence the constructive discussions that already take place at all levels of the challenge process and to ensure that Managers take proper account of IRO challenge. Discussions have taken place with the Heads of LAC and Locality to drive forward the formal Issues Resolutions process.
Enabling closer links with Children in Care Councils.	One IRO already maintains links with the CICC. The OM with a lead for LAC has attended the CICC on three occasions throughout 2018/19 and has developed new LAC paperwork / processes in line with feedback / discussions with the CICC. Young people from the CICC routinely assist with interviews / recruitment. Moving forward, in 2019/20 the CICC will be invited to attend a Unit meeting and to support with Departmental training in relation to the new documentation / processes.
Making it a duty of IRO services to assess local authorities' looked-after children services as a whole.	ESCC LAC and Locality Services already invite close links with the Safeguarding Unit; each of the LAC and Disability teams have a named link IRO who attends team meetings throughout the year; this has been reinstated across Locality. The OM with lead for LAC also attends meetings with the OMs, PMs and Heads of Service for LAC and conducts audits/development work with the LAC and Children's Disability OMs. The LAC, Locality and Disability Service's data and management systems are open to the IRO Service, supervision records are transparent and IROs are able to see the whole child's file. The OM for Fostering has specifically invited comment on the capacity and quality of placement options. Work has started with Children's Disability to review Short Breaks guidance. The IRO Outcome document considers the broader service implications raised by each review.

Committee:	Corporate Parenting Panel
Date:	26 July 2019
Title of Report:	Looked After Children (LAC) Statistics
By:	Director of Children's Services
Purpose of Report:	To update the Panel on changes in the last quarter

RECOMMENDATION:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to comment on and note the report.

1. Background information

1.1 Services for LAC are predominantly funded from the Children's Services base budget with some additional smaller funding streams supporting specific activity e.g. Virtual School activity from the Pupil Premium Grant.

1.2 Data is drawn as a snapshot on the last day of the month and inevitably there will be some changes subsequently as data is cleansed, however the past quarter has seen a slight reduction and on the last day of June there were 593 children in care, down from 608 in the previous report. Pressure on the Fostering Duty system remains intense however as placements disrupt and children need to be moved, often at short notice.

1.3 A total of 413 children were in foster care at the end of June, with 81 of those children in agency placements. In addition, we have 47 young people in supported housing options, homes or hostels. 22 children were placed for adoption. 3 children were placed with foster carers who are also approved adopters under the Fostering for Adoption pathway; we continue to see Adoption Order applications being delayed significantly by repeated parental appeals.

1.4 The number of children with kinship carers now stands at 46, some of whom have remained within their extended family but legal proceedings have been initiated by ESCC to resolve complex situations or an uncertain legal status for children.

1.5 20 children were placed at home with their parents whilst subject to a final legal order. Planning for placements of this sort is always monitored rigorously in order to mitigate any risk factors and agreement to begin or end a placement with parents is given at a senior level.

1.6 At the end of the quarter 33 children were placed in mainstream agency residential care placements and 2 in agency residential care placements for disabled children on a full-time basis. Staff continue to make every effort to place children in the 12 mainstream beds that we have in-house as the first option and to negotiate costs with the chosen agency provider where this is not possible. This approach is also the same with children in the Disability service where 8 children are currently in in-house beds on a full-time basis.

1.7 At the end of the quarter 4 ESCC children were secured at Lansdowne and a further 1 was secured in County Durham- that being the nearest bed available on the day. So far it has not been possible to return her to the local area which is obviously placing considerable pressure on her family and on staff given the distance and time taken to visit. 4 of the children were secured in the context of exploitation, with the remaining child having severe emotional wellbeing difficulties which caused her agency placement to serve notice. Although exit planning is underway for all 5 children. It will be significantly challenging and likely very expensive to put an alternative plan in place for them all.

1.8 We have had 1 new remand to custody during this quarter. This young man was not previously a LAC but became so by virtue of the remand. He spent a week remanded to a Secure Training Centre with costs met by the Youth Offending Team budget and has now returned to the care of his mother, although he remains remanded to the care of ESCC so is technically still a LAC. He will be sentenced in July at which point he will no longer have LAC status.

1.9 Overall the numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking young people was down slightly to 35 at the end of June.

1.10 The numbers of children subject to Child Arrangement/Residence Orders and Special Guardianship Orders have also remained reasonably stable at 333 and 454 respectively.

1.11 There have been no complaints from our LAC in quarter 1

2. Conclusion

2.1 Pressure on the system continues driven by the numbers of and costs for children. Continued close oversight will be maintained.

2.3 There have been no complaints during this quarter.

STUART GALLIMORE

Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer:

Liz Rugg, Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care

Tel: 01273 481274

Email: aaron.sams@Eastsussex.gov.uk

Local Members

All

Background documents

None

Children's Services LAC Summary between 01/07/2018 and 30/06/2019

Placement Type	Jul 18	Aug 18	Sep 18	Oct 18	Nov 18	Dec 18	Jan 19	Feb 19	Mar 19	Apr 19	May 19	Jun 19
A3 - Placed for adoption with consent (under section 19 of the 2002 Act) with current foster carer	1	1		2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1
A4 - Placed for adoption with consent (under section 19 of the 2002 Act) not with current foster carer	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3
A5 - Placed for adoption with placement order (under section 21 of the 2002 Act) with current foster carer	3	4	4	3	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3
A6 - Placed for adoption with placement order (under section 21 of the 2002 Act) not with current foster carer	13	13	14	13	11	11	10	14	12	15	15	15
H5 - Residential accommodation	30	37	34	32	34	36	30	33	33	30	32	30
K1 - Secure unit	2	2	1		2	2	2	1	2	4	5	5
K2 - Homes and Hostels	48	47	45	44	46	44	45	43	44	47	46	47
P1 - Placed with own parents	21	21	22	25	23	23	23	23	22	23	22	20
P2 - Independent living	2	3	2	1	2	2	3	1				2
R2 - NHS/Health Trust	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	2
R5 - Young Offender Institution or prison										1	1	
S1 - All Residential schools	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	2	2	3	3
U1 - Foster placement with relative or friend- long term fostering	9	9	9	9	10	9	8	8	7	7	7	7
U3 - Foster placement with relative or friend- not long term or FFA	43	52	49	52	49	43	43	41	37	36	38	39
U4 - Placement with other foster carer- long term fostering	112	109	106	103	100	98	96	92	93	92	91	88
U5 - Placement with other foster carer who is also an approved adopter- FFA	2	3	3	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3
U6 - Placement with other foster carer - not long term or FFA	306	311	316	316	321	323	326	322	328	322	321	325
Total	601	620	615	612	613	606	601	593	593	590	593	593

Immigration Status	Jul 18	Aug 18	Sep 18	Oct 18	Nov 18	Dec 18	Jan 19	Feb 19	Mar 19	Apr 19	May 19	Jun 19
Asylum Seeker	2	2	2	2	2	2						
British Citizen	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Discretionary Leave to Remain in the UK to 18 (DLR)	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
DLR to 18th Birthday, extension applied for	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Exceptional Leave to Remain in the UK (ELR)	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Refugee Status	7	9	9	9	9	10	8	11	11	10	10	9
Refused Asylum, Appeal applied for	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child	4	8	7	7	19	20	20	20	21	20	20	20

Legal Status	Jul 18	Aug 18	Sep 18	Oct 18	Nov 18	Dec 18	Jan 19	Feb 19	Mar 19	Apr 19	May 19	Jun 19
Child Arrangements Order/ResidenceOrder S8(1)CA'89	333	334	334	334	334	334	334	334	334	334	333	333
Special Guardianship Order S14A CA 89	444	445	446	448	449	449	449	449	453	454	454	454